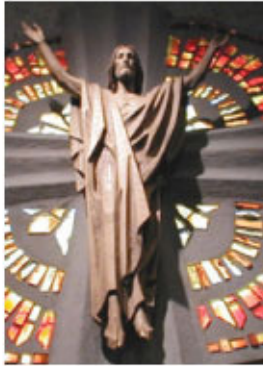


The Ascension of the Lord



year A

Matthew 28:16-20

16 The eleven disciples set out for Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had arranged to meet them. 17 When they saw him they fell down before him, though some hesitated. 18 Jesus came up and spoke to them. He said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.'

Other readings: Acts 1:1-11 Psalm 46 (47) Ephesians 1:17-23

This gospel reading contains the final verses of the Gospel of Matthew. There is no explicit reference to an ascension of Jesus, but this is the last meeting of Jesus with his disciples. The different gospels recount different appearances of the Risen Jesus. At the empty tomb the message had been given that Jesus was to go before them into Galilee. The only meeting of the Risen Lord with the eleven disciples in Matthew's gospel is this meeting on a mountain in Galilee. The gospel ends where the ministry of Jesus had begun, with his instructing the disciples on the mountain.

The initial encounter with Jesus is somewhat subdued. Matthew, like the other evangelists, reports a certain hesitation on the part of the eleven. There were some who hesitated. The gospel accounts speak of a transformation in the appearance of the Risen Jesus which may explain their hesitation. The disciples were not gullible individuals, desperate to continue their association with Jesus, but objective observers who wanted to make sense of what was happening.

The words of Jesus are solemn and forceful. He claims authority in a way he never did during his ministry. He sends the disciples forth to 'make disciples' of all the nations. The earlier hesitations in this gospel about preaching to non-Jews are put aside. Now is the time for a mission to the whole world.

The disciples are to baptise and to teach. Baptism is the sign of entry into the community of the disciples of Jesus, and of being drawn into the life of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The reference to the Holy Trinity reflects the practice of the early Christians.

What does the ascension of the Lord mean to you?

In what ways is Jesus present for us today?

Pray that we may never forget that Christ has taken our humanity with him to the Father.

Pray for the readiness to receive the Spirit of Jesus at Pentecost.