

Ascension of The Lord (May 24th, 2020)

Acts 1:1-11

This book has been well described as the “Gospel of the Holy Spirit”. There is hardly a page in the Acts of the Apostles where we fail to read about the Spirit and the action by which He guides, directs and enlivens the life and work of the early Christian community. It is He who inspires the preaching of St. Peter, who strengthens the faith of the disciples, who confirms with His presence the calling of the Gentiles, who sends Saul and Barnabas to distant lands, where they will open new paths for the teaching of Jesus. In a word, His presence and doctrine are everywhere.¹

In the first book, This refers to the Gospel of Luke which was written by the same author.¹

Theophilus, Like the gospel, it is dedicated to “the beloved of God” who possibly was an educated Christian of an upper-class background or he may be a fictitious person who is a symbol of “the beloved of God.”¹ **I dealt with all that Jesus did and taught** This is to be seen in the light of the mysteries of Christmas and Easter.⁴ (CCC 512) Note that doing must come before teaching!¹

until the day he was taken up, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. This implies that what Jesus began to do in Luke he continues to do through his disciples in Acts.² The “apostles” refers to the Twelve minus Judas whose unique witness is prepared by both association with Jesus’ entire ministry and the Risen Lord’s 40-day instruction.⁵

He presented himself alive to them by many proofs after he had suffered, Christ’s body was glorified at the moment of his Resurrection as proved by the supernatural properties it subsequently and permanently enjoys but during the forty days when he eats and drinks familiarly with his disciples and teaches them about the kingdom, his glory remains veiled under the appearance of ordinary humanity.⁴ (CCC 659) **appearing to them during forty days** The Resurrection of Jesus is a miracle substantiated by many strands of evidence: his tomb was empty Easter morning, he presented himself alive to the apostles and other disciples that evening, he invited eyewitnesses to touch his risen body and examine his wounds, and he showed himself risen to more than 500 people at once.² For the ancient Israelites, the number 40 would symbolize a time of intense training and preparation for some great work. It recalls the forty years Israel spent in the desert preparing to enter the Promised Land and the 40 days Moses fasted on Mount Sinai when receiving the Ten Commandments. Most of all, these forty days parallel Jesus’ fast in the desert before he was led by the Spirit to begin proclaiming the kingdom in Galilee. In the same way he now spends forty days preparing the apostles to be led by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, when they will begin their ministry to the ends of the earth.⁶ **and speaking about the kingdom of God.**

While meeting with them, he enjoined them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for “the promise of the Father about which you have heard me speak; The promise of the Father is the Holy Spirit poured out through Christ.²

for John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” The baptism of John the Baptizer was aimed especially at conversion, at a change in the condition of a soul, at being incorporated into the spiritual posterity of Abraham. Baptism with the Holy Spirit creates a new reality. It purifies from sin, brings about a change in the soul, and, above all, raises man to a participation in the very life of God.³

When they had gathered together they asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” The apostles still imagine that the work of the Christ is the political restoration of the Israelite monarchy.³ They hoped for a militant Messiah who would redeem Israel from the

yoke of Roman oppression and rebuild the kingdom of David that had lain in ruins since the sixth century B.C. These political aspirations are given a spiritual fulfillment in Acts with the enthronement of Christ in heaven and the redemption of Israel and the Gentiles in the Church.² He answered them, “It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has established by his own authority. Jesus affirms the coming of the kingdom but conceals the precise timing determined by the Father. His words imply that speculation is pointless.²

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses That is, to the dying and rising of Jesus. We get the English term “martyr” from this word. All the disciples in Acts witness to Christ with their words and life, while Stephen and James offer the testimony of a martyr’s death.² in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Jesus answers by foreshadowing the birth of the Church at Pentecost, not the restoration of the monarchy.³ This verse is really the outline of Acts for the author plans to tell the story of the growth of the Church, beginning in Jerusalem and spreading through Judea and Samaria to the ends of the earth. In Luke’s Gospel, Jerusalem was the destination point of Jesus’ public life; here it is the departure point.¹

When he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, This is the last event, the last mystery of our Lord’s life on earth.¹ and a cloud took him from their sight. Many times throughout salvation history God has manifested his divine presence to Israel in the form of a cloud. It was in a cloud of glory that God’s presence filled the sanctuary in the desert, filled the temple in Jerusalem, and overshadowed Christ during his transfiguration. Now that same cloud of glory lifts Jesus up and brings him to heaven in triumphant glory.⁶

While they were looking intently at the sky as he was going, suddenly two men dressed in white garments stood beside them.

They said, “Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven.” The angels are referring to the Parousia—our Lord’s second coming—when he will judge the living and the dead.¹ The Church’s earliest creeds affirm that Christ will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.² Christ’s return to the Father on a cloud also signals the fulfillment of an important prophecy from the OT. The prophet Daniel had a vision of a “son of man” figure who appeared victorious over his enemies and was carried to God *on the clouds of heaven* in order to be given a world-wide kingdom that would last forever.⁶

Ephesians 1:17-23

This reading is an exultant hymn celebrating the role of Christ in God’s plan to save. The first paragraph is a greeting and a blessing and a prayer for all who hear it. It prays that all may receive understanding and wisdom regarding what God has accomplished for the salvation of the world through Jesus the Christ. And then it proceeds to recount that accomplishment. In the second paragraph we hear the writer celebrate the completion of Christ’s earthly ministry and his return to the glory of the Father’s right hand, surely explaining why the text was chosen for today’s feast. In the final paragraph we see Christ as ruler of the world, head of the church (his body), and the fullness of the believers who fill every corner of the universe. It is a victory hymn as we approach the end of the Easter season. “The battle is over; the victory won.”⁷

Brothers and sisters:

May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, The God who has revealed himself through Christ and to whom Jesus himself, as man, prays and asks for help. The same God as was described in the Old

Testament as “the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob” is now defined as “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁹ **the Father of glory, give you a Spirit of wisdom and revelation resulting in knowledge of him.** The Apostle is seeking special gifts from the Holy Spirit for all his readers: wisdom, which enables one to penetrate the mystery of God, and also revelation which is not a recognition of new truths, but rather of special light from the Holy Spirit so as to have a deeper appreciation of the truth of faith or of the will of God in a particular situation.⁹

May the eyes of your hearts In biblical thinking, the heart is the center of the person, where thinking, willing, and feeling originate.⁸ **be enlightened,** Enlightenment of the innermost vision means an openness to the truth, but also the recognition of what deserves to be clung to. When enlightened by the Holy Spirit, it recognizes what things are worth loving and what things ought to be rejected and it goes farther, is more sublime and more perfect than mere reason.³ **that you may know what is the hope that belongs to his call,** St Paul wants God to enlighten the minds of the Christians and make them realize the consequences of their calling to be members of the holy people of God, the Church. Hope is a supernatural virtue, infused by God into our soul, by which we desire and expect eternal life, promised by God to his servants, and the means necessary to obtain it⁹ **what are the riches of glory in his inheritance among the holy ones,** and **what is the surpassing greatness of his power for us who believe, in accord with the exercise of his great might,** This expresses the theme of God’s mighty power overcoming humanly impossible obstacles.⁵

which he worked in Christ, raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavens, The right hand is a position of royal honor and sovereignty.⁸ This expression shows that Christ shares in God’s kingly authority.⁹

far above every principality, authority, power and dominion, Names given in Jewish and Christian tradition to different choirs or orders of angels. They can refer to blessed angels or to demons who fell from their ranks. Paul’s point is that God has elevated Christ far above all creation, including things visible and material as well as things invisible and spiritual.⁸ **and every name that is named not only in this age but also in the one to come.** Jewish tradition distinguished between the present evil age and the coming messianic age. Just as Christ’s coming marked the transition from the Old Covenant era to the New, so he will come again in glory to close the present age of history and open the future age of eternity.⁸

And he put all things beneath his feet A position of subjection and defeat.⁸ **and gave him as head over all things to the church** St Paul sees the Church as the body of Christ and Christ as the head. The image of body and head highlights the life-giving and saving influence of Christ on the Church and at the same time emphasizes his supremacy over the Church.⁹

which is his body, Christ reigns supreme over the cosmos and the universal Church, which is his “body.”⁸ **the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way.**

Count the blessings this prayer includes: 1. knowledge of God through insightful wisdom, 2. enlightenment in hope that guides us through difficult times, 3. awareness of the inheritance that is ours, and 4. understanding of how powerful our faith is.⁷

Mark 16:15-20

¹⁵Jesus said to his disciples:

“Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature.

¹⁶Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned. Mark's gospel stresses that the apostles must spread the Christian faith by (1) evangelization and (2) the administration of the sacraments (CCC 977, 1253, 1257). The apostles' mission to the whole creation includes all the nations of the world.¹¹

¹⁷These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will drive out demons, they will speak new languages.

¹⁸They will pick up serpents with their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not harm them. They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." The power of the gospel is displayed through the miracles of those who preach it. In the early Church, the apostles drove out demons (Acts 16:16-18), spoke in new tongues (Acts 2:4-11), sustained the sting of serpents unharmed (Acts 28:1-6), and healed infirmities by placing their hands on the sick (Acts 3:6-8; 28:8, CCC 434, 670). These signs can motivate believers and inspire unbelievers to believe.¹¹

¹⁹So then the Lord Jesus, after he spoke to them, was taken up into heaven and took his seat at the right hand of God. Jesus ascended into heaven 40 days after His Resurrection (Acts 1:3). Here He sits as King of Kings and Judge at the right hand of the Father.¹¹

²⁰But they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs.

Some of the information for this commentary was taken from: (1) "The Navarre Bible: Acts Of The Apostles", (2) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Acts of the Apostles" With Introduction, Commentary and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (3) "St Joseph Commentary On The Sunday Readings" by Achille Degeest, O.F.M., (4) "The Catechism Of The Catholic Church", (5) "The Jerome Biblical Commentary", (6) "The New Rosary In Scripture" by Edward Sri, (7) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2004" by Aelred R. Rosser, (8) "Ignatius Catholic Study bible: The Letters of St. Paul to the Galatians & Ephesians" With Introduction, Commentary and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (9) "The Navarre Bible: Captivity Epistles," (10) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 1998" by Lawrence E. Mick, (11) "Ignatius Catholic Study bible: The Gospel According to St. Mark" With Introduction, Commentary and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.