

For groups using the new format

(Facilitator: Follow the instructions shown in italics.)

ASCENSION OF THE LORD

May 13, 2018 B

(Before starting, allow a few minutes for the members to exchange greetings, then call the group together to prayer.)

Facilitator: Let us take a minute to consciously place ourselves in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.

(Pause for a minute.)

(Play a religious song if you are able to do so.)

Opening prayer: *God our Father, make us joyful in the Ascension of your Son, Jesus Christ. May we follow him into the new creation, for his Ascension is our glory and our hope. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.*

*(Prior to your meeting you are encouraged to read the first and second readings and the commentary on them. After the opening prayer, go to the section titled **Proclamation of the Gospel**, i.e., skip the first and second readings as well as the commentaries.)*

FIRST READING: Acts 1:1-11

In Kings 2:4-15, the prophet Elijah told his disciple Elisha that he would receive a double portion of the Holy Spirit if he saw Elijah being taken up into heaven. It came to pass; Elisha witnessed the flaming chariot take up Elijah into heaven in a whirlwind. Thus Elisha received the spirit of Elijah and proceeded on to Jericho to continue his mission.

In Acts 1:9, the disciples see Jesus being taken up into the clouds only to return to them in the Spirit in chapter 2. They are to carry on the mission of Jesus just as Elisha continued the ministry of Elijah.

This reading shows us that the Ascension of Jesus marks the end of his journey on earth and signals the beginning of a new era. The mission of the Church begins under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 47

This is a prayer of praise and creation of a liturgical celebration of the enthronement of God.

SECOND READING: Ephesians 1:17-23

This is an excerpt from a prayer of thanksgiving. Paul begins by praying that all believers in Jesus will be blessed by wisdom and revelation of his ways. Then he prays that believers may be enlightened on three things: 1) hope which is rooted in the possession of the Holy Spirit; 2) the inheritance of God's life ("glory")

as definitely assured; and 3) the tremendous power of God's abiding presence in believers. Just as God marvelously raised Jesus from death to life in the Resurrection, so too will Christians experience radical change in their own lives. What happened to Jesus will happen to those who believe in him.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL

Facilitator: Let us now listen to this Sunday's Gospel.

(A member of the group reads the gospel.)

(After the reading pause . . .)

Facilitator: *As we listen to the second reading of the Gospel, let's be aware of what draws us in and what might be a challenge for us to embrace.*

Facilitator: *Let us now take a moment to quietly meditate on the Gospel text.*

GOSPEL COMMENTARY

Facilitator: *Let us now read quietly the gospel commentary.*

GOSPEL: Mark 16:15-20

The disciples are given the necessary means of salvation: belief in Jesus and baptism into the Christian community. They are commissioned "to proclaim the Gospel to the whole world" so that all

will have a chance to be saved. While many will hear the message, not all will open their hearts to it. Mark names signs that will accompany believers that they will be blessed with empowerment to continue the healing ministry of Jesus. Their *teaching ministry* will be accompanied by a *healing ministry*. The reference to ‘picking up snakes and drinking deadly poison’ is not to be taken literally. It is a Middle Eastern form of hyperbole, a way of saying that followers of Jesus will have his power to overcome all forms of evil. They will possess a power beyond their own to enable them to cope with the hardships of life. For example, many people have been healed by the power of prayer; others have been delivered from the power of Satan; and still others have received the power of God to help them to stop drinking and be freed from the painful memories of a difficult childhood. If Ascension means being lifted up, then we need to believe in the healing power of God to lift us up when we are wounded and possessed by demons of one kind or another. Jesus’ Ascension marks the end of his life on earth and the beginning of the mission of the Church, which all of us participate in by means of our Baptism.

Facilitator: Break into small groups. If the group is six or more, break into smaller groups of three.

FAITH SHARING QUESTIONS

1. As you listened to the gospel, what words caught your attention? Why?
2. After the Ascension, the disciples return to Jerusalem to await the coming of the Holy Spirit. What new or fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit do you desire at this time for your parish and for yourself?
3. Jesus’ last message to his disciples is a commission to evangelize every creature. To what extent is your parish faithful to this Great Commission? How faithful are you? How can both you and your parish carry out more faithfully this commission of Jesus?
4. Jesus’ Ascension is a time of transition for the Apostles. Share a time of transition in your life that turned out to be a blessing.
5. What is Jesus saying to you about how a faithful disciple should act?

JOURNALING ON THE WORD

(*Gather the group back together.*)

Facilitator: Take a few minutes to journal on the word/message you are hearing in this Sunday’s Gospel. You may also wish to use this time to formulate a prayer response to the word. In other words, as you reflect on the Gospel, what do you wish to say to Jesus about what you are hearing him say? Perhaps you may also wish to express how you may need him to help you to live the message. Learning to pray about the message we hear in the Gospel is a significant step in our spiritual growth.

Let us take a few moments to share what we discern as Jesus’ message to us in today’s Gospel.