

## Ascension Day 21<sup>st</sup> May 2020



‘Live’ Streaming of the Eucharist at 12 noon

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As we approach Ascension Day tomorrow the Church keeps the solemn Feast of the Ascension and celebrates the glorious return of Jesus to the Father. Here at St. Paul’s in Monaco we shall maintain our distancing as we acknowledge the distancing of Jesus physically departing the earth. However, as Jesus promised that He would return we are also left with another promise, that of the Presence of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The birthday of the Church.

It is the promise of the Spirit which animates the Churches at this time and at all times, and we are all called to pray during this period of Ascensio[n]tide for the renewing of the Spirit in our lives. At a time when some may find the isolation difficult we need to hold on to the promise that God, through His Holy Spirit is with us at all times. We are surrounded by the Spirit at all times. We may not feel it, but He is with us, comforting us and renewing us at all times. We need to remember to humble ourselves in our daily prayer as we pray for others and especially those suffering with loss or with the virus. At the end of this ‘mail out’ to-day you will find a section called **Thy Kingdom Come** with it’s associated link. This is a worldwide initiative that I recommend for us to use during this time from Ascension to Pentecost. The theme this year is ‘Prayer and Care’ appropriately following through the common theme that we have been looking at in these weeks since Easter.

Meanwhile, on Ascension Day, a Bank holiday here in Monaco, in respect of this great day, let us all take time to pray for our world and its renewal as we prepare for Pentecost. I invite you to join with us on our Facebook page at 12 noon if you can at St. Paul’s Anglican Church Monaco for ‘live’ streaming of our service. It will be a said service continuing the format we have been celebrating since the ‘lockdown’.

Below I have incorporated the readings for the day and some commentary that you might find useful in your reflections on the day. The reflections are taken from the ‘Universalis’ App. Which I have recommended for daily prayer.

### **First reading Acts 1:1-11**

In my earlier work, Theophilus, I dealt with everything Jesus had done and taught from the beginning until the day he gave his instructions to the apostles he had chosen through the Holy Spirit, and was taken up to heaven. He had shown himself alive to them after his Passion by many demonstrations: for forty days he had

continued to appear to them and tell them about the kingdom of God. When he had been at table with them, he had told them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for what the Father had promised. 'It is' he had said 'what you have heard me speak about: John baptised with water but you, not many days from now, will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.' Now having met together, they asked him, 'Lord, has the time come? Are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel?' He replied, 'It is not for you to know times or dates that the Father has decided by his own authority, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and then you will be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judaea and Samaria, and indeed to the ends of the earth.' As he said this he was lifted up while they looked on, and a cloud took him from their sight. They were still staring into the sky when suddenly two men in white were standing near them and they said, 'Why are you men from Galilee standing here looking into the sky? Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven, this same Jesus will come back in the same way as you have seen him go there.'

*How are we to envisage what happened at the Ascension? Two feet disappearing into a cloud? It is mentioned only in the Acts. Luke, the author, is putting across several messages. Firstly, the 40 days since Easter should not be carefully counted. In biblical language '40' makes just 'a fairly long period', often a period of preparation, like Jesus' 40 days being tested in the desert, or Israel's 40 years of the Exodus. For all that time Jesus has been preparing his apostles. Secondly, it is the definitive parting of the physical Jesus, after which the Risen Christ is no longer with his disciples. It is now the Spirit of Christ which is at the heart of the Church, inspiring all its activity. Thirdly, Luke represents Jesus as a prophet (and more than a prophet), so he leaves his disciples in the same way as the prophet Elijah, who was taken to heaven in a fiery chariot, leaving his disciple Elisha to carry on his work, filled with a double share of his spirit.*

### **Second reading Ephesians 1:17-23**

May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give you a spirit of wisdom and perception of what is revealed, to bring you to full knowledge of him. May he enlighten the eyes of your mind so that you can see what hope his call holds for you, what rich glories he has promised the saints will inherit and how infinitely great is the power that he has exercised for us believers. This you can tell from the strength of his power at work in Christ, when he used it to raise him from the dead and to make him sit at his right hand, in heaven, far above every Sovereignty, Authority, Power, or Domination, or any other name that can be named not only in this age but also in the age to come. He has put all things under his feet and made him, as the ruler of everything, the head of the Church; which is his body, the fullness of him who fills the whole creation.

*The blessing which forms the core of this reading gives the sense of the Ascension for the Church. It is not the manner of Christ's departure which is important, but the exalted position of Christ, and the power of God which raised Christ from the dead. This same power has called us to be believers, made us rich in the glory of his heritage, and has given us the strength to follow Christ. As Christians we believe that Jesus was divine not only from birth but from the moment of his conception. It was then that the Word of God became flesh. And yet something further happened at the glorification of Christ in his resurrection. Paul says he was 'constituted Son of God in power' at the resurrection. Is this the same as the claim which the high priest declared blasphemous, 'You will see the son of man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds of heaven'? In the final scene of the gospel of Matthew Jesus declares, 'All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me', and the Book of Revelation shows the Risen Christ sharing the throne of God.*

### **Gospel Matthew 28:16-20**

The eleven disciples set out for Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had arranged to meet them. When they saw him they fell down before him, though some hesitated. Jesus came up and spoke to them. He said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, 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.'

*For Matthew this is a momentous climax. Jesus is on the holy mountain, Where is this mountain? We do not know; nor does it matter. The importance is that Jesus is commissioning his followers as the Second Moses. Just so he taught the Sermon on the Mount on the holy mountain, as Moses had given the Old Law on the mount of Sinai. He*

*is the glorious Son of Man of the prophecy of Daniel, to whom all authority on earth was given; but to him is given all authority in heaven and on earth. As Jesus sends them out, he promises that his divine presence will be always with them. It is in the strength of that presence that they will pursue their task. This promise provides the final bracket of the Gospel, as the name given to Jesus by the angel provided the opening bracket: 'They will call him "Emmanuel", a name which means "God is with us".' The divine presence of God in Jesus and in his community is the clue to the whole Gospel of Matthew. In the centre of the Gospel it is again stressed, 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.'*

*On a superficial level this gospel reading seems chosen because of the Trinitarian baptismal formula. It is the only time this formula comes in the scripture, and it is remarkable that the Trinitarian liturgical formula was already developed while the New Testament was being written. At a deeper level this reading of the final five verses of Matthew gives a wonderful Trinitarian view of the work of salvation. The words of the Risen Christ, 'all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me' are reminiscent of the vision of the exalted Son of Man in Daniel, who comes to the One of Great Age, seated on his throne, and receives from him all power on earth. Only Christ receives all power in heaven too, as 'the Son of God in power'. In this power he sends out his disciples, promising his divine presence always. The promise of Christ's divine presence in his Church now, at the end of the gospel, balances the promise at the beginning in the name Emmanuel, given by the angel for the child. Emmanuel means 'God with us'. So the permanent presence of Christ is the message of the whole gospel.*

### **A poem for Ascension from The College of the Resurrection Mirfield by Laura Darrall.**

They stood, floundering in the light,  
Eyes blinking as the Son rose at dawn,  
Hands cracked, they opened palms to let him go,  
They hadn't realised they'd been holding too tight,  
No talk of pitching tents this time from Peter,  
No competition from James or John,  
Just an empty silence full with wonder-  
The man they loved was here but gone.  
The dust between their toes began to speak,  
To hint at hardships on the road ahead,  
Their chests began to open and heave-  
One of them ran for wine, the other grabbed bread.  
Mary Magdalene was singing as she walked, the splendour of the moment masking its end.  
Thomas looked back, to check he'd really gone,  
That doubtful niggler, his ever faithful friend.  
Mary his mother stood quiet, an ache in her womb kept her still, she lifted her face to the dappled dawn sun,  
And whispered, 'Thy will not my will be done.'

## **Thy Kingdom Come**

Thy Kingdom Come is a worldwide prayer movement that invites Christians around the world to pray from Ascension to Pentecost. Since its launch by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York in 2016, Christians from 172 countries and 65 denominations have taken part in praying for friends and family to come to faith in Jesus Christ. These days have always been full of expectation and anticipation. As the Lord Jesus ascended, He promised the gift of the Holy Spirit to enable the disciples to be witnesses. As they waited for the promise to be fulfilled they devoted themselves constantly to prayer (Acts 1:14). So, the renewed call across the church is to set these days apart to pray, and each individual to pray for 5 people to come to know the love and peace of Jesus Christ.

The Prayer Journal, for the 11 days has poignant reflections, Bible verses and actions, and features artwork from Charlie Mackesy. It can be accessed from the link below. This is an excellent way to pray at home with friends or family or just by yourself.

<https://www.thykingdomcome.global/sites/default/files/2020-04/Prayer%20Journal%202020%20C19V.pdf>