

**THE SOLEMNITY OF THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD
THE SEVENTH WEEK OF THE EASTER SEASON**

Sun. **THE SOLEMNITY OF THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD**
29 **CATECHESIS ON THE CREED - THE ASCENSION OF JESUS**
 General Audience of His Holiness Pope Francis - Part 1

Mon **Monday of the 7th Week of Eastertide**
30 **CATECHESIS ON THE CREED - THE ASCENSION OF JESUS**
 1. General Audience of His Holiness Pope Francis - Part 2

Tues. **The Feast of Mary's Visitation**
31 **LEADING OTHERS TO CHRIST**
 A reflection taken from talks by St. Pope John XXIII

Wed. **The Memorial of St. Justin Martyr**
June 1 **WORSHIPING AS A CHRISTIAN**
 From In Defense of the Christians by St. Justin Martyr

Thurs. **Thursday of the 7th Week of Eastertide**
2 **A CALL TO CHRISTIAN MATURITY IN FAITH**
 A reflection from a sermon by St. Pope Leo the Great

MONASTIC DESERT DAY

Fri. **The Memorial of Charles Lwanga & Companions**
3 **LOVING ONE ANOTHER**
 A reflection taken from "Catholic Online"

Sat. **Saturday of the 7th Week of Eastertide**
4 **WHY IT IS GOOD THAT CHRIST LEAVE US?**
 A reflection from a homily on John's Gospel by St. Augustine

Sunday

CATECHESIS ON THE CREED - THE ASCENSION OF JESUS General Audience of His Holiness Pope Francis - Part 1

In the Creed, we say that Jesus “ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father”. Jesus’ earthly life culminated with the Ascension, when he passed from this world to the Father and was raised to sit on his right. What does this event mean? How does it affect our life? What does contemplating Jesus seated at the right hand of the Father mean? Let us permit the Evangelist Luke to guide us in this.

Let us start from the moment when Jesus decided to make his last pilgrimage to Jerusalem. St Luke notes: “When the days drew near for him to be received up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Lk 9:51). While he was “going up” to the Holy City, where his own “exodus” from this life was to occur, Jesus already saw the destination, heaven, but he knew well that the way which would lead him to the glory of the Father passed through the Cross, through obedience to the divine design of love for mankind. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that: “The lifting up of Jesus on the cross signifies and announces his lifting up by his Ascension into heaven” (n. 662).

We too should be clear in our Christian life that entering the glory of God demands daily fidelity to his will, even when it demands sacrifice and sometimes requires us to change our plans. The Ascension of Jesus actually happened on the Mount of Olives, close to the place where he had withdrawn to pray before the Passion in order to remain in deep union with the Father: once again we see that prayer gives us the grace to be faithful to God’s plan.

At the end of his Gospel, St Luke gives a very concise account of the event of the Ascension. Jesus led his disciples “out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God” (Lk 24:50-53). This is what St Luke says.

I would like to note two elements in the account. First of all, during the Ascension Jesus made the priestly gesture of blessing, and the disciples certainly expressed their faith with prostration, they knelt with bowed heads, this is a first important point: Jesus is the one eternal High Priest who with his Passion passed through death and the tomb and ascended into heaven. He is with God the Father where he intercedes forever in our favor (cf. Heb 9:24). As St John says in his First Letter, he is our Advocate: How beautiful it is to hear this! When someone is summoned by the judge or is involved in legal proceedings, the first thing he does is to seek a lawyer to defend him. We have One who always defends us, who defends us from the snares of the devil, who defends us from ourselves and from our sins!

Dear brothers and sisters, we have this Advocate; let us not be afraid to turn to him to ask forgiveness, to ask for a blessing, to ask for mercy! He always pardons us, he is our Advocate: he always defends us! Don’t forget this! The Ascension of Jesus into heaven acquaints us with this deeply consoling reality on our journey in Christ, true God and true man, our humanity was taken to God.

Monday

CATECHESIS ON THE CREED - THE ASCENSION OF JESUS General Audience of His Holiness Pope Francis - Part 2

... Christ opened the path to us. He is like a roped guide climbing a mountain who, on reaching the summit, pulls us up to him and leads us to God. If we entrust our life to him, if we let ourselves be guided by him, we are certain to be in safe hands, in the hands of our Savior, of our Advocate.

A second element: St Luke says that having seen Jesus ascending into heaven, the Apostles returned to Jerusalem “with great joy”. This seems to us a little odd. When we are separated from our relatives, from our friends, because of a definitive departure and, especially, death, there is usually a natural sadness in us since we will no longer see their face, no longer hear their voice, or enjoy their love, their presence. The Evangelist instead emphasizes the profound joy of the Apostles.

But how could this be? Precisely because, with the gaze of faith they understand that although he has been removed from their sight, Jesus stays with them forever, he does not abandon them and in the glory of the Father supports them, guides them and intercedes for them.

St Luke too recounts the event of the Ascension — at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles — to emphasize that this event is like the link of the chain that connects Jesus’ earthly life to the life of the Church. Here St Luke also speaks of the cloud that hid Jesus from the sight of the disciples, who stood gazing at him ascending to God (cf. Acts 1:9-10). Then two men in white robes appeared and asked them not to stand there looking up to heaven but to nourish their lives and their witness with the certainty that Jesus will come again in the same way in which they saw him ascending into heaven (cf. Acts 1:10-11). This is the invitation to base our contemplation on Christ’s lordship, to find in him the strength to spread the Gospel and to witness to it in everyday life: contemplation and action, *ora et labora*, as St Benedict taught, are both necessary in our life as Christians.

Dear brothers and sisters, the Ascension does not point to Jesus’ absence, but tells us that he is alive in our midst in a new way. He is no longer in a specific place in the world as he was before the Ascension. He is now in the lordship of God, present in every space and time, close to each one of us. In our life we are never alone: we have this Advocate who awaits us, who defends us. We are never alone: the Crucified and Risen Lord guides us. We have with us a multitude of brothers and sisters who, in silence and concealment, in their family life and at work, in their problems and hardships, in their joys and hopes, live faith daily and together with us bring the world the lordship of God’s love, in the Risen Jesus Christ, ascended into Heaven, our own Advocate who pleads for us.

Tuesday

LEADING OTHERS TO CHRIST

A reflection taken from talks by St. Pope John XXIII

The Gospel of St. Luke presents us with a picture of Mary hurrying to bring help to Elizabeth. But she not only brings human help, she brings the salvation that is Christ. This is a sign and symbol of what we are all called to do.

There are many apostolates to which God calls us. There is an apostolate of learning, because faith comes from hearing and so we must always keep our ears open to God's voice, even as the ears of Elizabeth and her unborn son, John, were open to the words God spoke through Mary. There is an apostolate of teaching, by which the words received in truly open ears and hearts are shared with others, even as was the case with Mary's. She didn't intend to teach when she uttered her Magnificat but she did. Then there is the apostolate of dying which is that of helping one another surrender oneself completely into God's loving hands. Mary learned this by sharing in the dying of Jesus, her son and her savior. These are all apostolates to which we too are called.

Mary is at the heart of the Christian revelation as she is at the heart of all Christian living, precisely because she went wherever God directed her to go. That is what brought her to Elizabeth; an archangel, a most special messenger of God, told her of Elizabeth's need for help in responding to the gift of God given to and through her.

God reveals to us the needs of others and it is up to us to respond. Why would God's providence reveal such needs except to call us to reach out as Mary did to Elizabeth? This is truly one of the loftiest aims of human life, and a most meritorious answer to the call to the Lord's service.

Motives for melancholy, however, are never in short supply. They have never been lacking in the history of the world! A wise Christian must do whatever is possible to free oneself and others from such sad thoughts. Mary provides a wonderful example and source for consolation and strength.

Jesus never preached a greater sermon than from the cross when he gave himself completely into the hands of his Father. Who was there to hear those words and absorb them completely? All the world knows the story of the Lord's last testament when he left his own mother to the world as universal mother. She was to witness to all the total giving of all that is precious and wonderful to us into the hands of our God! She witnessed it and she made it her own gift of self. She is to help us all learn to make that gift.

God calls us to work to perfect our own spiritual lives and we have Mary to imitate. We must be constant in our search for what is best and in making our conduct ever a better and better instrument of God's grace for others. We must cherish in our hearts a great confidence, perhaps like that which the child Jesus showed to his mother as she taught him to pray and to love God's Holy Word and will. We seek to embody and even to hasten the triumph of the charity of Christ.

How can this fail to encourage mutual love and concern? We are to learn to feel impelled by all that unites people and prepares for the Lord's coming to redeem and unite the entire world. Mary can only lead us to Christ and Christ leads all to God. We are sent to help this happen.

Wednesday

WORSHIPING AS A CHRISTIAN

From In Defense of the Christians, by St. Justin Martyr

We hold a common assembly on Sunday because it is the first day of the week. It is the day on which God put darkness and chaos to flight and created the world. It is also the day our Savior, Jesus Christ, rose from the dead. He was crucified on Friday and on Sunday appeared alive to his apostles and disciples. He taught them the things that we are passing on for your consideration.

None may share the Eucharist with us unless they believe that what we teach is true, unless they are washed in the regenerating waters of baptism, and unless they live in accordance with the principles given us by Christ. We don't consume the bread and wine of the Eucharist as ordinary food and drink, for we have been taught that as Jesus Christ our Savior became human by the Word of God so this food that our flesh and blood assimilate makes us become the flesh and blood of the incarnate Jesus.

The apostles in their recollections, called gospels, handed down to us what Jesus commanded them to do. They tell us that he took bread, gave thanks, and said: Do this in memory of me; this is my body. In the same way, he took the cup, he gave thanks, and said: This is my blood. Ever since that time, we have constantly reminded one another of these matters. The rich among us help the poor and we are always united. For all that we receive, we praise the Creator of the universe through his Son, Jesus Christ, and through the Holy Spirit.

In our Sunday assembly the recollections of the apostles, or the writings of the prophets, are read as long as time permits. When the reader has finished, the president of the assembly speaks to us, urging everyone to imitate the examples of virtue we have heard about in the readings. Then we all rise together and pray.

At the conclusion of our prayer, bread and wine and water are brought forward. The president offers prayers and gives thanks to the best of his ability, and the people give their assent by saying, "Amen"! The Eucharistic bread and wine are distributed, and everyone present communicates. The deacons take it to those who are absent.

The wealthy, if they wish, may make a contribution. They themselves decide the amount. The collection is placed in the custody of the president, who uses it to help the orphans and widows and all who for any reason are in distress. This may be because they are sick, in prison, or away from home. In a word, he takes care of all who are in need through the sharing of those who have enough.

Thursday

A CALL TO CHRISTIAN MATURITY IN FAITH

A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Pope Leo the Great

The Lord's Ascension increased the faith of the infant Church and this was strengthened by the gift of the Holy Spirit. That faith remained unshaken by chains, imprisonment, exile, hunger, fire, being fed to starved beasts, and the most refined tortures that could be devised. Not only men but boys, not only women but girls as well, shed their lifeblood in this struggle to keep the faith. It is a faith that cast out devils, healed the sick, and raised the dead.

Even the apostles, though they had been strengthened by witnessing many miracles and much teaching by the Lord himself, were afraid by reason of the cruel sufferings of the Lord's passion and couldn't accept his resurrection without hesitations. Yet they made such progress by means of Christ's ascension that they began to find joy in what had terrified them before. They were now able to fix their attention on Christ's divinity and his having gone to sit at the right hand of the Heavenly Father. What was present to their senses no longer hindered them from fixing their attention on the realization that the Son had not left the Father when he descended to the earth and so neither had he abandoned his disciples when he ascended into heaven.

This was a kind of great spiritual growth. The Son of Man was revealed to them as Son of God in a more perfect way once he had entered into his glory. He now was even more present to them than he had been when he lived among us. A more mature faith enabled them to stretch their minds upward to the Son in his equality with the Father. Contact with Christ's tangible body isn't necessary.

The Lord's glorified body retained its human nature but the faith of those who believed in him was raised to new heights. They now could know that, as the Father's equal, the Only Begotten Son isn't reached physically but by spiritual discernment. We see why the Lord said to Mary Magdalen: "*Don't cling to me*". In other words, I don't want you to come to me by what you sense but I want you to wait for something higher. I am preparing you for what surpasses all ordinary knowledge. When I have ascended you will experience me in a more perfect way and believe what now you can't see.

While the disciples were watching the Lord ascending into heaven, two angels came to them. "*Men of Galilee, why are you standing here gazing into heaven? This Jesus who has been taken from you will come again, in the same way, you saw him leave.*" By these words, we have all been taught to believe that Jesus Christ will come again, visibly and in the same flesh. He had been served by angels from his birth and now they assure us that all things are subjected to him. An angel announced Christ's conception to the Blessed Virgin. Angels announced his birth to shepherds. Now angels tell us that he is Lord and will come again in his full Lordship.

All these things are intended to lead us to believe what tremendous authority he will have at the end of all things. Do you want to accompany him into his heavenly home? Then you must follow the angels and accompany him in ministering to others, especially to our brothers and sisters in faith. That is full maturity in faith.

Friday

LOVING ONE ANOTHER

A reflection taken from “Catholic Online”

Uganda was evangelized only in the 19th century. At this time much of the country was ruled by King Mwangi. He was given to violence and was also a pedophile who forced himself on the boys and young men serving as pages and assistants to the king. The steward of the king's affairs was a Catholic convert. At some point, King Mwangi killed a protestant missionary his steward, Joseph Mikasa, protested and even told the king he needed to change his lifestyle. The king struck him with a spear and ordered him executed. When he was being tied up before execution, he told them: “A Christian who gives his life for God isn't afraid”. He forgave Mwangi and again made a last plea for the king to change. He was beheaded and burned.

The instruction of the pages and attendants was taken over by Charles Lwanga, a leader of the local Christian community. His policy was to keep young men away from the king. In May the king's suspicions were aroused; he asked one page what he had been doing that kept him busy and away from his king. The reply was that he has been receiving religious instruction. The king had the instructor brought before him and killed him by thrusting a spear through his throat. Then he ordered the royal compound sealed so no one could enter or leave.

In the morning the king brought all those living in the compound together and ordered them to separate: “Those who pray on this side; those who don't pray on the other!” Those who professed themselves Christians were asked if they intended to remain such. They answered that they did. There were fifteen of them and all were condemned to death.

They were marched to a place of execution 37 miles away and amazed others with their spirit and bravery, especially the White Fathers responsible for the Christian community as a whole. One of the soldiers guarding them was found to be a Christian too and was ordered to be killed with the others. Also killed was a chief who had led others to the Christian faith and a local judge. The chief so angered the counselor in charge that he ordered him wounded badly and left to die slowly over three days. Three

The survivors were wrapped in reed mats and then placed on a pyre. They told the executioners: “You can burn our bodies but you cannot harm our souls!” They were burned to death. Following this incident, all Christian missionaries were expelled from the country.

After King Mwangi died and missionaries returned, they were surprised to see the Christians who had not been killed had helped each other and continued to share their faith. The community amounted to about 500 baptized adults and they had close to a thousand catechumens. All this had been done simply by the grace of God and the strength given to ordinary Christians by the witness of those who had died for God. This is how those who believed helped one another keep faith and help others accept that gift.

Saturday

WHY IT IS GOOD FOR US THAT CHRIST LEAVE US **From a homily on the Gospel of John by St. Augustine**

“I tell you the truth: it is for your own good that I am going away, because unless I go the Advocate will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you.” Christ dwelt among us in the condition of a servant, as Word made flesh, but he won’t go on loving us with merely natural affection. We aren’t to be content with baby’s milk but must long to grow up fully in Christ. Unless I wean you, Jesus says, you will never have an appetite for adult food. As long as you cling to my bodily presence in a natural way you will remain incapable of receiving the Holy Spirit.

Did the Lord mean that it was impossible to send the Holy Spirit while he was still on earth? Of course not! He had never left the dwelling place of the Spirit nor had he left the Father in such a way as no longer to be with Him. Indeed, we know that Christ himself received the Spirit at his baptism. We know that the Son and the Spirit are inseparable.

The Gospel passage you have just heard means that the disciples couldn’t receive the Holy Spirit as long as they only knew Christ according to the flesh. That is what is behind the assertion by St. Paul, made after he had received the Holy Spirit. Here it is: *“Even if we used to think of Christ in a human fashion, we don’t do this anymore.”* When we know the incarnate Word spiritually, our knowledge, even of his humanity, becomes more than merely human. This is the lesson the Master wanted to give the disciples that it was good for them that he was going away. If he didn’t change their way of thinking the Spirit wouldn’t come to them.

The withdrawal of Christ’s bodily presence from the disciples meant not only that the Holy Spirit would come to them but that the Heavenly Father and the Son would dwell with them in a spiritual way. Christ’s departure didn’t mean that the Holy Spirit would simply take his place. It meant rather, that together with Christ the Spirit would make his home in the hearts of the disciples. If this weren’t so what would become of our Lord’s promise to be with his disciples always?

Here is another promise: *“The Father and I will come to you and make our home with you”*. The fact is that the Lord promised to send the Holy Spirit in just this way so he would always be with his disciples. When their purely natural and human affections had become spiritualized—through the Spirit—then they would be capable of the indwelling of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Let this give us hope and courage and confidence.