

Year C Ascension of the Lord
Acts 1:1-11; Ps 47; Heb 9:24-28; 10:19-23; Lk 24:46-53
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Jesus Christ, God's Word made flesh, the only-begotten Son of God, finished his earthly life and task and ascended to his rightful throne at the right hand of the Father. This "ascension" to God is intimated in many places in the Hebrew Scriptures. The actual word in Greek which Luke uses in Lk 9:51; cf. Acts 1:11, is more accurately translated "assumption, a taking-up," but of course we apply this word to the Virgin Mary. "Assumption" is what is said of Elijah in the Greek (LXX, Septuagint) version of 2 Kgs 29 when he was taken up into heaven (and expected to return, like Jesus in Acts 3:17-24).

In any case, Jesus earned his "throne" the hard way, by suffering for us. This is what the Letter to the Hebrews tells us, which is all about Jesus Christ's eternal priesthood, and how Jesus was ordained. Jesus was only able *to sit* after finishing his salvific task (Heb 1:3; cf. Jn 19:30; in Acts 7:56 he is still standing!). Jesus is the one priest who truly expiated or atoned for our sins; he was the only one who truly entered into God's own "sanctuary" (presence), and not just into the Tabernacle which was its mere image and which the Jewish priests entered every year on Yom Kippur with the blood of animal sacrifices. Jesus entered with his own blood (Heb 9). This required great suffering and generosity, as my Hebrews professor (now Cardinal) Vanhoye used to repeat. Jesus was "perfected" through his suffering (Heb 5:5-10). Now this "perfection" is thought by many scholars to mean "priestly ordination;" the Greek Septuagint's term for priestly ordination is "perfect the hands" (as in LXX Exod 29:9).

Now this was a great victory for our Lord. This is what the "enthronement" Ps 47 celebrates. Great military leaders in antiquity celebrated "triumphs" by parading and leading around their captives. This is the beautiful image Paul uses in 2 Cor 2:14-15, stating that the "good odor of Christ" (his pleasing sacrificial offering, cf. Phil 4:18; Heb 13:16; Rom 12:1; 1 Pet 2:5) is spread by the slaves of Christ Jesus like himself. See also the triumph imagery in Col 2:15. This is what Eph 4:8 states, that Christ ascended triumphantly into heaven, into God's very presence, victorious over God's enemies (see Ps 68:19).

Now this victory of the Messiah is sung in two connected psalms, Pss 2 and 110, cited in Heb 1:5, 13. Ps 110 also speaks about the high priest Melchizedek . . .