

READINGS FOR SUNDAY, MAY 28, 2006
(Ascension of the Lord)
(Acts 1:1-11; Ps 47; Eph 4:1-13; Mark 16:15-20)

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Jesus' victory as Lord risen from the dead is expressed in the image of his sitting at the right hand of God (though Stephen sees him standing in Acts 7:56). He would be sitting on a throne (as set out for the Ancient of Days and the Son of Man in Dan 7:9-14; cf. Rev 22:1, 3), at the Father's right as in Ps 110, cited by Jesus in his Jewish trial (Mark 14:61-62) and quoted in Acts 2:29-36. Appropriately, Ps 47 is an "enthronement psalm" celebrating Yahweh's kingship over the whole earth.

Jesus, through the sacrifice of his Passion, has accomplished his "work" (John 4:34; 17:4; 19:30). He has obtained for us an eternal salvation (Heb 5:7-10), and can now sit down (Heb 10:11-18) and rest, as God did in the first creation (Jesus has achieved the new creation, 2 Cor 5:17; cf. Rev 21:1-6). It is now up to us to follow in his footsteps and continue his work of salvation (cf. Heb 4:9-11; Phil 2:12).

The first reading reflects the time of waiting and working which characterizes the period of the Church (Luke, the author of Acts, divides history into the time of Israel, the time of Christ and the time of the Church). Jesus' disciples are to be his witnesses after his visible presence leaves this world. Rather than stare at the sky distractedly, we should get to work, confident that Jesus will return and "restore the Kingdom to Israel" (see 1 Cor 15:22-28). The gospel reading describes the task of Christians in early, charismatic language (cf. Mark 6:7-13; Matt 10:1-10; Luke 9:1-6). They are bearing witness to Jesus as mandated in Acts.

The reading from Ephesians presents a picture of this Christian life in the Church (whom Jesus has married, Eph 5:25-32). We are called to unity, to be one body with one Spirit, in 'peace and love'. Each one has particular gifts (*charismata*). These gifts (attributed to the Spirit in 1 Cor 12:4-11; Heb 2:4) are from Christ and due to his Paschal victory (he descended in humility and was thus exalted very highly, Phil 2:6-11; Isa 52:13-53:12). All these gifts and works are to build up the body of Christ, until we reach the place and height where Christ already is.