

COMMENTARY ON READINGS FOR SUNDAY, MAY 8, 2005
(Ascension of the Lord)
(Acts 1:1-11; Ps 47; Eph 1:17-23; Matt 28:16-20)

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It is Luke, the author of that gospel and Acts, who provides us with a certain chronological sequence of the events following Jesus' resurrection, and specifically, the Ascension and Pentecost. Primitive Christianity, very focused on the final consummation of all things ("eschatology," the end of the present world in its sorry state and the ushering in in its fullness of the Kingdom of God), expected things to happen quickly. Instead, the early Christians learned that things would take place more gradually. Luke especially emphasizes the gradual process of salvation history. Thus, Jesus is said to show himself and share meals with his apostles for forty days, promising them that his Father will finally send the Holy Spirit promised and expected from of old. As to his return and the final consummation of all things, and any timetables associated therewith, that is not for them to know, but will indeed occur in its proper time; cf. Mark 13:32. One is not to futilely stand there looking up to heaven, but boldly go out and evangelize, as Peter will begin to do on Pentecost.

The gospel reading is Matthew's version of Jesus' farewell. As all great religious events, it takes place on a holy mountain. Jesus proclaims that the divine *dominion* (lordship) of God's Kingdom, spoken of in Dan 7:13-14, has been given to him. That is, the whole expectation of pious Jews in the "Old Testament" is fulfilled in Jesus, the crucified and risen "Son of man," in whom humanity is restored, Jesus the new Adam, in whom God's new creation exists, redeemed from sin. Therefore the disciples are to go out and make disciples of all the (pagan) nations, baptizing them in the Trinity and teaching them all that Jesus has commanded (the fulfilled or perfected Torah, as Moses had taught what God had commanded in the Pentateuch). And as Jesus (and Mary) fulfilled the Immanuel prophecy of Isa 7:14 in Matt 1:23 at the beginning of the gospel, now Jesus promises to be God's presence with the Church at the end of this gospel; see also Matt 18:20.