

The Ascension of the Lord (C)  
(Acts 1:1-11 / Luke 24:46-53)  
01.06.2025  
*Worship & Hope*

The Ascension of the Lord must have been a life-changing experience for the disciples. The sequence of events: death of Jesus, apparitions and Ascension of the Lord must have led them on a kind of emotional and spiritual roller coaster.

What seemed particularly important for St Luke is that, just after the Ascension, the disciples “were continually in the Temple praising God”. We could say that in order to deal with the absence of Jesus, the disciples felt the need to gather together in the place where God was present, the Temple in Jerusalem. For them, to come together for worship was a way to acknowledge Christ’s physical absence as a possibility for a renewed relationship, a new form of presence.

What characterises the first group of Christians is that, as we read in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, “they spent much time together in the Temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts” (2:46). Here the important word is “together”. And this characteristic is as important today as it was for the early Christian community. To worship together was – and is – an essential element of our Christian identity.

We have to be careful, our Sunday Eucharistic celebrations are meant to nourish not only our individual relationship with God. From the earliest days of the Church, participating in the communal celebration of the Lord’s Supper was recognised as a manifestation and intensification of the community’s shared life in Christ.

From this perspective, when the first disciples gathered together, they could rely on Jesus’ promise: “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Mt 18:20). Christ is present to our gathering, not only because of his presence in the Sacrament and in the Scriptures, but because he is present to each one of us, within each one of us. He is present through our coming together.

The Christian tradition has always considered the times of common worship to be privileged opportunities for the faithful to grow in their love and knowledge of God, and to go deeper in their experience of being members one of another.

The Ascension of the Lord sets before us two challenges: the first challenge is to discern the Lord’s presence in every place and time, in all those we meet and in all the events of our lives.

The second challenge is precisely to become so Christlike that we can make the Lord’s presence visible by the whole of our lives, by our witness, preaching and missionary zeal.

Whatever our calling in life, as the baptised, our first mission is to be present in the world and to the world; to be the Lord’s witnesses where we are, to be really present to those with whom we live, to their concerns and expectations, to be involved in the political and economic structures of our countries. To bring the Good News into all the aspects of our lives is our first mission.

According to Pope Leo, the “basis of every mission” is love (*Hom.* 20.05.25). So for you and me, love must be the driving force of our presence as Christians in the world. It is our responsibility to bear witness to love wherever we are, whatever we do.

Pope Leo thinks that, during this Jubilee Year, one aspect of love that we have to foster in the world is hope. Pope Leo reminded us that, like the apostles, we are commissioned “to

cast [our] nets again and again, to bring the hope of the Gospel into the ‘waters’ of the world” (*Hom.* 20.05.25). Last week, he invited us again to strive to be witnesses who offer hope to the world (cf. *Address after Celebration at St John Lateran*, 26.05.2025).

To commemorate the Ascension of the Lord is not a call for us to keep on staring into the sky, to keep our eyes fixed on a celestial realm where Christ might be thought of as now living exclusively. The Lord is faithful to his promise: “In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me.” (Jn 16:16)

We can see him here and now, active and alive, in the Sacraments and in one another.

The Ascension invites us also to be heralds of Christ as our hope (cf. 1Tim 1:1), to live in such a way that our humble presence radiates hope and dispels the darkness of despair. Not hope as a pie in the sky but as a force within us for action and transformation of the world.

In his first letter, St Peter tells us that Christ is our “living hope” (1P 1:3). Because of his Ascension and the gift of the Spirit, Christ can dwell in our hearts. For this reason, in the strength of Christ our hope within us, we can protest against all forms of death at work in our hearts and in the world. Not only we can do this, but also by virtue of the mission confided to us, together we must reject all forms of despair and fatalism, all that makes us complacent and disillusioned. When we see what is happening in Ukraine and in Gaza, in all the refugee camps and in the poorest parts of our countries, when we see how our own hearts can become hard and judgemental, we may be tempted to lose hope. But to lose hope is not an option for us because that would be the beginning of death and we are made for life.

May we make our own Pope Francis’ words: “Dear brothers and sisters, (...) let us lift up our hearts to Christ, and become *singers of hope* in a culture marked by much despair. By our actions, our words, the decisions we make each day, our patient efforts to sow seeds of beauty and kindness wherever we find ourselves, we want to sing of hope, so that its melody can touch the heartstrings of humanity and reawaken in every heart the joy and the courage to embrace life to the full.” (*Hom.* 09.05.2024)