May 24
2020

ASCENSION OF THE Lord

MEN OF GALILEE, WHY ARE YOU STANDING THERE STARING AT THE SKY? THIS JESUS WHO HAS BEEN TAKEN UP FROM YOU INTO HEAVEN WILL RETURN IN THE SAME WAY AS YOU HAVE SEEN HIM GOING INTO HEAVEN.

Acts 1:11

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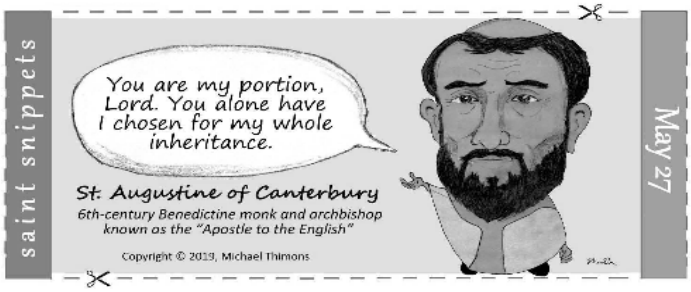
Saint Philip Neri (1515-1595)

May 26

In a shop near the Vatican, a group of Americans laughed as the shopkeeper showed off his fluent English and latest souvenir, a key ring whose papal portrait, when pressed, activated a recorded blessing. Through the shop window, two clerics scowled disapproval. The shopkeeper grunted, "They're a very somber order who've left the Church. I recognize them." "By their long robes?" an American asked. "Many in Rome wear robes," replied the shopkeeper. "It's their long faces!" When Philip Neri arrived in sixteenth-century Rome, there was reason to be somber. Swiss Guards had been massacred on Saint Peter's steps defending the pope. Parts of Europe were abandoning the Church. But Philip resolved to be an "apostle of joy," drawing especially the young to Christ—and frequent confession and Communion—by his sincere interest in their problems, prayerful example, and gentle humor. His "Oratory," a movement as well as a place, provided recreation and devotion in a joyful atmosphere of companionship, service, and liturgy. Philip Neri challenges each of us to begin improving Church and world by changing ourselves with unfailing joy.

—Peter Scagnelli, Copyright © J. S. Paluch Co.



"Pushed" Out On Mission

There is a delightful character in the original Dr. Dolittle Tales called the "Pushmi-Pullyu." It is a beast with two identical halves, with a head at each end. No matter which direction the beast walks, one end is the "push me" and the other is the "pull you." Today's feast is a bit like that in the life of the church. In the book of the Acts of the Apostles, it is the ascension of Christ that calls for the Holy Spirit, which consequently sends or "pushes" the church out on its mission. This is the message that we hear from the angels today as they tell the friends of Jesus not to look up into the clouds, but to get busy. It is the message of Jesus himself in Matthew's Gospel, as he sends them out to baptize. He also tells them, "I am with you always, until the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). And it is this message, confident in faith that Jesus has ascended to shouts of joy, that "pulls" us along to our final destiny. The life of the faithful disciple, sent into the world on mission, will one day know the same risen, ascended glory.

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Readings for the Week

Monday:	Acts 19:1-8; Ps 68:2-3ab, 4-5acd, 6-7ab; Jn 16:29-33
Tuesday:	Acts 20:17-27; Ps 68:10-11, 20-21; Jn 17:1-11a
Wednesday:	Acts 20:28-38; Ps 68:29-30, 33-36ab; Jn 17:11b-19
Thursday:	Acts 22:30; 23:6-11; Ps 16:1-2a, 5, 7-11; Jn 17:20-26
Friday:	Acts 25:13b-21; Ps 103:1-2, 11-12, 19-20ab; Jn 21:15-19
Saturday:	Acts 28:16-20, 30-31; Ps 11:4, 5, 7; Jn 21:20-25
Sunday:	Vigil: Gn 11:1-9 or Ex 19:3-8a, 16-20b or Ez 37:1-14 or Jl 3:1-5; Ps 104:1-2, 24, 35, 27-28, 29-30; Rom 8:22-27; Jn 7:37-39 Day: Acts 2:1-11; Ps 104:1, 24, 29-31, 34; 1 Cor 12:3b-7, 12-13; Jn 20:19-23

Saints and Special Observances

Sunday:	The Ascension of the Lord; World Communications Day
Monday:	St. Bede the Venerable; St. Gregory VII; St. Mary Magdalene de' Pazzi; Memorial Day
Tuesday:	St. Philip Neri
Wednesday:	St. Augustine of Canterbury; Shavuot (Jewish observance) begins at sunset
Thursday:	Julian Calendar Ascension
Friday:	St. Paul VI

Heaven

The world is only peopled to people heaven.

—St. Francis de Sales

Today's Readings

First Reading — Jesus tells the disciples that they will be witnesses to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:1-11).
Psalm — God mounts his throne to shouts of joy: a blare of trumpets for the Lord (Psalm 47).
Second Reading — May the Father of glory give you a Spirit of wisdom and revelation (Ephesians 1:17-23).
Gospel — Jesus instructs the Eleven to baptize and teach people of all nations (Matthew 28:16-20).

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Treasures From Our Tradition

There was a curious custom years ago that perhaps developed in an age when Easter was seen less as a baptismal season than as a kind of tour through the deeds of the Risen Christ. The paschal candle, sign of Christ's presence, was removed from public view on Ascension Thursday, banished to the baptistery.

Ascension day does speak of the hidden aspects of Christ's life among us, but it does not have much to do with God's absence. Christ has not shed his human life like an inconvenient shell, but rather has taken humanity into heaven. The theologian Karl Rahner said that it is a festival of "the nearness of God." In vanishing from our sight, Christ has become utterly available to all at every time and every place, and is "closer to us than he ever was."

Today is the feast of believing that beyond our final breath is a presence that waits for us, a banquet prepared, a tender homecoming embrace. Rahner said that today is a festival of the future of the world, a day for anticipating the world's true destiny, and therefore hardly a day to be going around hiding candles!

—Rev. James Field, Copyright © J. S. Paluch Co.

The key to unlocking the scriptures is in Paul's letter to the Ephesians as we pray, "May the eyes of your hearts be enlightened." People see and hear things but simply have a hard time believing they are true. In our first reading from the very beginning of the Acts of the Apostles, Luke starts where his Gospel left off—the ascension of Jesus. For as long as Jesus spent preparing the disciples, they were still foggy about what was happening, and spent time staring at the sky wondering where he went. In today's Gospel, the disciples still doubt Jesus to the very last minute. In the letter to the Ephesians, Paul speaks to the new Christian community, but could be preaching to each of us in the pews as he says, "I can explain it to you, but I can't make you believe. This is where faith comes in." May we all pray for the gift of enlightenment today!

Here Is The Game Plan

When we hear an excerpt from a particular Gospel, it is easy to get the details and stories from all the Gospels all mixed up and combined into one. Theologian Gerhard Lohfink called this "Making Gospel Soup!" To understand today's Gospel passage, we must realize that this is material particular to Matthew and in his telling it takes place right after the Resurrection. There has been no "doubting Thomas" or any of the other stories that we've heard since Easter.

How often have you made a plan at an event, saying, "If we get split up, just go back to the car and wait" or "Stay at the fountain in the mall—I'll find you!" Earlier in Matthew, Jesus told the women at the tomb to tell the disciples, "If something happens, head back to Galilee" (28:10). This was the game plan and was both a geographic reference and a spiritual one. "Go back to what you know, what you remember." They were confused and hurting, but did as Jesus said, returning to Galilee, specifically to the mountain where they had a powerful experience with him before. That would make it understandable that the disciples showed up but were a bit leery or doubting.

You've Got This

Put yourself in the disciples' shoes. This is May, the season of graduations, new jobs, new cars, marriages, and so many other transitions as young people strike out on their own. Jesus reminded the disciples, "I have the power, and I've been teaching you for three years. Now you have the power. Go. Make Disciples. Baptize in the name of the Trinity. Teach them what I taught you." Surely the disciples were frightened, and Jesus must have felt both fear and pride. This was the moment that happens in every lifetime. It was time for these disciples, these students, his "children" to become the masters. And how did he reassure them? As parents and teachers and mentors have been doing for centuries. He smiled and reminded them, "Behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age." Or as we might say, "You've got this."

Today's Readings: Acts 1:1–11 Ps 47:2–3, 6–7, 8–9; Eph 1:17–23; Mt 28:16–20

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