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We celebrate today the Mystery of the Ascension of the Lord. Just before Pentecost and after Easter and the Passion. So it is surely linked to all of this and not a separate component of our faith. It is part of the Passover, connecting earth and heaven, God and its people, all centered on Jesus Christ and Lord. We have two narratives about this mystery, one from Luke and one from Mathew, very different in their style and approach. But they have something in common: they talk about a departure. Jesus is leaving. And he is leaving his disciples. Where is he going? He is going into heaven. Not getting into a celestial elevator, or as a rocket taking off to the sky, but he enters fully into the world of God, into the divine life, as the numinous cloud in Luke suggests. In some way, he is going back home. This week, in our pandemic context, a cartoon said that Jesus is going to work from home, as many of us do now! But Jesus is not moving spatially, he is changing his mode of presence with us.

There is a painting by Fra Angelico, a miniature from the Armadio degli Argenti, (c.1450), about the Ascension (<https://www.gettyimages.ca/detail/news-photo/ascension-of-jesus-christ-from-the-armadio-degli-argenti-news-photo/587491330>). We do not see Jesus but only a cloud and some white clothing, in a golden space of light, in a blue sky; we see the disciples standing in a circle, and Mary in the center; they are dressed in colors, including gold and blue, looking into heaven. In another miniature (c.1485), by Jean Colombe, from Les très riches Heures du duc de Berry (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Très_Riches_Heures_du_Duc_de_Berry#/media/File:Les_Très_Riches_Heures_du_duc_de_Berry_Janvier.jpg), we see entirely a golden Jesus in the blue sky but also the imprints of his feet on the rock. And we see the kneeling disciples in blue and gold, with Mary and also the holy women, even if the two angels said: Men of Galilee. Interesting! Both works have a background of mountains and include biblical quotations: the Word of God is source and part of the paintings.



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What do these images say? Often they speak more strongly than many words. Jesus is not departing as if he was going away, far away from us. His presence will be different: earth and heaven, Jesus and his disciples, are now powerfully connected through the risen Christ, who now is fully with his Father and present also with us and within us (next week with the Pentecost). Catherine of Siena has well expressed this connection with an image: Jesus is a bridge, between God and humanity, between heaven and earth. As she said in her Dialogues, even if this bridge lifted up to heaven on Ascension Day, it did not leave the earth. And on this bridge, there is a guesthouse, offering hospitality to the travelers.

Let us look more closely at Matthew. We have today the end of his Gospel, very solemn, with Jesus sending the disciples into mission. Where is the rendez-vous between Jesus and his disciples? On the Mountain. This is not anecdotal. Usually, in the Bible, important events happen on the mountains. It is the privileged place for meeting the living God in its power and glory, with more intensity. In Matthew, it is the main symbolic place. And what happens on the mountains? Usually two things and a third: a revelation of God's face, a mission given, and a promise. Just as Moses on the Horeb discovered the face of God and then was sent to free his people; and when he raised doubts about his capacities, God promised support and presence. We have the same here: Jesus risen revealed as the universal Lord (as the 2nd reading, Ephesians, also underline), the disciples, with their faith and their doubts, sent to all nations, and the promise of Jesus to be with them always.

What happens in these mountains is the development of a vocation, including a deeper discovery of God and, related to this experience, a mission. So where are my own mountains where I experienced a sense of the truth and goodness and beauty of the living God? It can be a particular moment in my life, a special place, confined or opened, a group, a music, a friendship, a celebration, and even these Sunday meetings. Sometimes, I need to go back to the mountain to be awed again.



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What mission have I been called to in these experiences? Action, contemplation; caring, searching, taking responsibility, learning to serve, ... The mission the disciples received in Mathew is very meaningful. It starts with Go, so they have to go down the mountain; the mission is not on the mountain! And it is universal (all nations), very inclusive. This mission is not first of all to transmit ideas, even deep, or to organize activities, even interesting, or to build institutions, even necessary. It is to make disciples. A disciple is someone related to Jesus, following his way, and related to other disciples, brothers and sisters, in the community of faith. Then the other dimensions may follow: sacraments (baptizing) and ethics (teaching to). This mission of discipleship remains quite relevant today.

This mission is not easy. If we can accept it, it is because the living Christ promises his presence, with us always. How can I recognize this presence, not obvious, so that my vocation be strengthened and renewed? Signs are offered to our eyes and ears, to our hearts and minds. Gestures and words of goodness, people caring for others in families, communities, streets, homes for elders, hospitals, who are icons of the Servant, still with us. Words and horizons of meaning, of value, deep within ourselves and in the wisdom of many witnesses, and especially in the Word of God, still with us. Scenes and works of beauty in the natural world and in the world created by humans, touching us intimately, pointing to a sacred spirit, breeze, still with us. Or simply the joy of children playing, the merciful smile of a grandparent, the challenging call of a friend, the fraternal support of a community. Signs of this presence with us are still offered in our confined and slowly opening spaces and times.

In this Eucharist, let us give thanks to the living God for our vocations, the revelations we experienced on our mountains, the missions we received. And for the mysterious presence, in our worlds, of the one who is in heaven and on earth, the bridge, the beloved Son and our beloved Brother, with us now and for the end of age. Amen.

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