

**The Ascension of Our Lord (observed), Sunday, May 24, 2020**

Pastor Peter Gregory, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Westminister, Massachusetts

**Christ High Ascended and Ruling**

Ephesians 1:15–23

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Eph 1:2*


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In Ephesians, St. Paul's prayer is **"that you may know what is the hope to which He [God] has called you, what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His great might that He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things under His feet and gave Him as head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all"** (vv 18–23).

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In times like these, people wonder, "Who's in charge? What's the Lord doing now? Where can we find Him?" Not just "people" — *we* wonder too. Looking around, we're tempted to say that no one's in charge, that the Lord is doing nothing, that He can't be found anywhere. Don't believe it! There's a great deal more going on than what we can see — as the ascension of our Lord reveals.

St. Luke tells us what the ascension is like from the ground. He puts us in the shoes of the disciples and gives us their perspective, looking up. As they watched, Jesus **"was lifted up, and a cloud took Him out of their sight"** (Acts 1:9). He enters the cloud — not just a regular cloud but the cloud of divine glory — and puts on a cloak of invisibility. **"[Jesus] parted from them,"** St. Luke writes, **"and was carried up into heaven"** (Lk 24:51). You might expect that being parted would leave the disciples depressed, despairing, or discouraged, but it doesn't. The disciples are filled with joy after Jesus' ascension, and **"they worshiped Him"** (v 52).

So this is the view from where we stand on earth: Jesus our brother is taken up into glory and hidden from sight, while the Church on earth rejoices and worships Him.

St. Paul adds another perspective. He gives us the view of the ascension from above. He puts us inside the cloud, right next to the angels and archangels. He gives us a peek at

the unseen throne. At the ascension, God “**seated Him [Jesus, our brother,] at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things under His feet and gave Him as head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all**” (vv 20–23). At the ascension, Jesus is seated *above* all, but not in a way that makes our worries or concerns beneath Him. His power is *over* all, but not in the manner of a tyrant. All things are *under* His feet—sin, death, and the devil crushed—yet a bruised reed He will not break and a faintly burning wick He will not put out. Thank God for that! Ascended on high, Jesus isn’t disconnected or separated from our world or from us, His followers. No! He’s joined as closely to us as your head is to your body, for He is the head of His body, the Church.

And guess what? Above, in heaven, angels, archangels, and the whole company of heaven rejoice at Christ’s ascension and they worship Him, too! Heaven and earth are united in praise of Jesus! The joy is almost palpable. A hymn of glory let us sing! Alleluia!

We confess that Jesus ascended into heaven. By this we don’t *just* mean that He ascended into the paradise of the redeemed. He did that and more! So have no doubt that, being human, Jesus opened the way into paradise for you, just as He did for the thief on the cross. Because of Him, wide open stand the gates adorned with pearl!

But there’s more. When Jesus ascended into heaven, He threw the gates wide open but kept on going all the way to the throne. As a man He ascended to the right hand of God, to the heaven of God’s majesty and glory and power. Jesus isn’t in heaven in the same way as our dear brother John Meyer or as our loved ones who died in faith. They are in heaven as citizens. Jesus is the ruling monarch, the King, not only of heaven but “**above all rule and authority and power and dominion**” and “**above every name**” of all times and places and over “**all things.**” He is the *pantocrator*—almighty, all-powerful. Even—*even* over the coronavirus and the world economies.

Another pastor [[Will Weedon](#)] puts it like this:

When we confess in the Creed that Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father we confess that the human nature which He assumed from the womb of the Blessed Virgin, and in which He offered to God the sufficient ransom to release all people from the debt of sin and the power of death, that this human nature has now been exalted and raised above every height imaginable, given the exercise of all power in heaven and on earth. The One who bears in His hands the scars of the nails now rules over all!

So when I complain about the way things go in my life, when I gripe about the troubles of the world or of the Church, I'm actually complaining about the way the Crucified and Risen One sees fit to govern, aren't I? Puts a different perspective on life, doesn't it? Me pitting my puny wisdom and ideas against the omnipotence and wisdom of Christ.

When Scripture proclaims that Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father, don't think of it as a seat of rest but a seat of honor. Not a La-Z-Boy but a throne—the King's seat! And Jesus is enthroned, not only as God but now also as true man. One like us is in the seat of power! Our own flesh and blood! The local kid makes it big! And Jesus isn't inactive. He isn't passive. At the ascension, He entered into a new and greater way of caring for His people. He is actually right now and actively right now ruling over all things *for our good*, even when we can't see it and don't understand it. This, too, is an article of faith. **"We walk by faith, not by sight"** (2 Cor 5:7).

And there's more! So our Lord Jesus not only rules all things for the well-being of His holy Church, but He also constantly intercedes for us with the Father. He is praying for us. He is bringing our needs before the Father. The Book of Hebrews says, **"Therefore He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them"** (Heb 7:25). He prays for you. When you sin, He says to His Father, "Father, forgive. Look not upon the sin, but look upon My scars that I have answered for all their sin." He is our Mediator. He stands in the breach between us and God. He didn't stop His work when He came down from the cross or rose from the dead. He continues to be your Mediator with the Father.

And yet there's even more. Not only does He ascend to heaven to intercede for us, but ascending to heaven doesn't put Him far away. He isn't removed from us, but He is brought even closer. True, we can't see Him, but He's not gone. Remember His promise which still stands, **"Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age"** (Matt 28:20). In the Church we confess that Jesus is not far away. He is present wherever His Word and Sacraments are. He is present in this preaching, in His body and blood by which He feeds and nourishes you. He is that close, ruling over you for your good, forgiving your sin, granting you life and salvation. The ascension brings you near and joins you to Him.

This is how great the treasures are of our Lord's ascension.

He rules over everything, so that peace replaces our complaining. He is constantly interceding for us, so that joy drives out our anxieties. He is constantly with us in His Word and Sacraments, so we are never alone. We are always with Him who sits

at the right hand of God. Jesus, your Mediator. Jesus, your King. Jesus, your risen, ascended, and glorified Lord. To whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be all glory and honor now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

*Phil 4:7*

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*Credit for the quotations and some of the other thoughts, organization, and material to the Rev. Will Weedon from his sermon for the Ascension on May 5, 2016.*

<https://weedon.blogspot.com/2016/05/homily-upon-ascension.html>