

Ascension Day message and prayers

Ascension Day (21 May) follows forty days after Easter Day. 'After his suffering, Jesus presented himself alive to the disciples by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God' (Acts of the Apostles 1:3). Then Jesus gathers his disciples around him on a mountain top, tells them to await the gift of the Holy Spirit, blesses them, is enveloped in a cloud and is taken from their sight (Matthew 28:16-17; Luke 24:50-53).

This is classic biblical picture language. In the Bible, forty days is a stereotyped period of the communing of humankind with God (Moses on Mount Sinai; Jesus in the wilderness). The mountain top is where earth touches heaven. The cloud always symbolises the presence of God in our midst. So the Ascension speaks of Jesus' return to the Father, after his earthly work was complete. It marks the end of the resurrection appearances. It sets the scene for the next great moment in the biblical drama and in the Christian Year – the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the infant Church at Pentecost (Whitsun). Ascensiontide tells us that Jesus is now one with the Father in heaven and one with his people on earth. In Matthew 28:16-20, at the Ascension, Jesus commissions the apostles to 'make disciples of all nations, baptising them and teaching them'. He ends with the promise: 'Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

Grant, we pray, O loving Lord, that as we believe your only Son Jesus Christ to have ascended into the heavens, so we in heart and mind may thither ascend and with him continually dwell; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

O God, the King of glory, you have exalted your only Son Jesus Christ with great triumph to your kingdom in heaven: we beseech you, leave us not comfortless, but send your Holy Spirit to strengthen us and to exalt us unto the place where our Saviour Christ has gone before; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Merciful God, we entrust to your unfailing care those who are suffering from pain or grief at this challenging time, knowing that your everlasting arms will hold us safe. Comfort and heal, restore to health and strength, all those in need; guide and support all who care for them, through the great Healer, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer. +The Grace.

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