



## OFFICE OF DIVINE WORSHIP

### **The Ascension of the Lord**

**May 5, 2021**

The Bishops of the Metropolitan Province of Newark (i.e. the State of New Jersey) have, for this year, joined most of the country in assigning the observance of the Ascension of the Lord to the Seventh Sunday of Easter. It is therefore transferred from Thursday, May 13, to Sunday, May 16, 2021. Below are some reflections on the Sunday celebration of the Ascension of the Lord.

In both the Gospel of Mark and the Gospel of Luke, the Ascension seems to occur on a Sunday, “the first day of the week.”

So then the Lord Jesus, after he spoke to them, was taken up into heaven and took his seat at the right hand of God. (See Mark 16: 9 & 19)

Then he led them [out] as far as Bethany, raised his hands, and blessed them. As he blessed them he parted from them and was taken up to heaven. (See Luke 24: 1 & 50-51)

Later in Luke’s Acts of the Apostles, the story of the Ascension takes place somewhat ambiguously “during forty days” after Easter, which may not have been a Sunday. However, the scriptures give a clear precedent for the Ascension occurring and being celebrated on a Sunday, the primordial feast day of the Church.

The actual time of the Ascension is not clearly defined. Some early Christians seem to have believed that the commissioning of the Eleven on Easter was followed by an immediate entrance into the heavens. Mark may be read in such a sense. Others remembered that the risen Lord and the disciples met later in Galilee, as in Matthew and John. Although his gospel is indecisive, Luke affirms in Acts that the Ascension was a visible event that took place near Jerusalem forty days later, hence, presumably on a Thursday. Early Christians, however, had little interest in the precise chronology of Luke. The Resurrection and Ascension were intimately associated, and the latter as well as the former was widely regarded as an event to be commemorated on the First Day of the week.

– HB Porter

*The Day of Light: The Biblical and Liturgical Meaning of Sunday*

Holy days during the week were added later to the church calendar. Their origins range from spiritual, economic and even social justice concerns. Over the centuries, they have been observed in a variety of ways in different times and places. Even today, holy days are observed differently throughout the world.

In the current church calendar for the USA, there are two holy days which have been moved from weekdays to Sundays; the Epiphany (January 6) and the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (Thursday after Trinity Sunday). When a Solemnity or Feast of the Lord occurs on a Sunday of Ordinary Time, it is celebrated on Sunday (e.g. The Transfiguration of the Lord).

## THE PASCHAL MYSTERY

*Therefore, O Lord, as we celebrate the memorial of the saving Passion of your Son, his wondrous Resurrection and Ascension into heaven, and as we look forward to his second coming, we offer you in thanksgiving this holy and living sacrifice.*

*– Eucharistic Prayer III*

These words from Eucharistic Prayer III highlight the essential elements of the Paschal Mystery: the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ. Palm Sunday, Easter Sunday, the Ascension of the Lord and Pentecost are hinge feasts of the Easter Season, which break open the meaning of these events from salvation history for the worshipping assembly. They are critical to the spiritual formation of the faithful into the Body of Christ; they immerse the worshipping community into the Paschal Mystery during the Easter Season.

Celebrating these Solemnities on Sunday promotes their ecclesiastical significance and in many cases provides more of the faithful the opportunity to fully participate in the Easter Mysteries because of their greater ability to attend on a Sunday. Celebrating the Ascension of the Lord on a Sunday, the day of resurrection and the day of light, recognizes its significance and more fully incorporates it into the liturgical celebrations of the Paschal event.

*For after his resurrection  
he plainly appeared to his disciples  
and was taken up to heaven in their sight,  
that he might make us sharers in his divinity.  
Therefore, overcome with paschal joy,  
every land, every people exults in your praise...*

*– Preface II of The Ascension of the Lord*

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