

**Ascension: Yr. A – 2020**  
[Acts 1:1-11; Eph 1:17-23; Mt 28:16-20]

How is the Ascension relevant to our lives? After all, our first reading says, *“He was lifted up, and a cloud took him from their sight.”* Does this mean Jesus rocketed through outer space to some faraway heaven and abandoned us? No, rather the Ascension is described in our Creed as an event that is pivotal to our salvation. *“He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead ...”*

First, when we speak of Jesus **ascending**, we do not mean that He went upward. Rather, the scripture and our Creed are pointing to the reality that Jesus descended when He came to earth and ascended or returned to Heaven. To use a different set of terms, Jesus humbled himself when He became a human child and was exalted when He went home to Heaven. The Ascension is not about physical movement, but rather a restoration of Jesus’ full glory and power as God.

Second, Jesus sitting at the **right hand of the Father** is not speaking about his throne or distance to God the Father, but rather it means He is our mediator. The right hand speaks to Jesus’ power, authority and continued governance of creation. This means Jesus hasn’t abandoned us, but is rather serving and caring for us in a higher capacity. In the last line of Matthew’s Gospel Jesus said, *“[B]ehold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”*

Third, Jesus returned to Heaven with a **human body**. This means He has opened a path to Heaven for us. And not only a path, but He is preparing our room. Jesus promised, *“In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. [...] I am going to prepare a place for you.”* When we die, our body and soul are temporarily separated until the end of time. In order to be human we need both a body and soul. Hence when we go to Heaven, we are not speaking of a place, but rather a person. Pope Benedict wrote, *“We go to heaven to the extent that we go to Jesus Christ and enter into him. Heaven, therefore, is a person: Jesus himself is what we call ‘heaven.’”*

Fourth, Jesus will **judge the living and the dead**. The reason we react so strongly when someone judges our short comings, is the fact he or she is imperfect and could not fully understand the situation. We cannot say the same about Christ. Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen wrote, *“No one to be judged could complain that God knows not the trials to which humans are subject. His very appearance as the Son of Man would prove that He had fought the same battles as men and endured the same temptations as those standing [before Him].”*

Lastly, Jesus went to **Heaven**, which will be our destination if we don’t postpone our travel preparations. The reward of Heaven or the consequence of Hell begins now in the human heart. The pattern of our life choices set us on a course heading. Think of the Israelites who escaped from Egypt. Their desire for the Promised Land was certainly not evident in their behavior. What was normally a journey that took weeks became four decades. Why? Their complaints and doubts about God’s rescue mission, their embrace of a handmade golden calf over the living God, and their rebellion against Moses. Yes, God forgives us more than we deserve and as often as we seek it, but our habits form a pattern. If a famous well-practiced violinist played one bad note, you would say, *“She is almost always perfect.”* If I tried to play a violin and accidentally struck one correct note, you would say, *“He’s never played a day in his life!”* Practice makes perfect in the spiritual life also.

From the Ascension to Pentecost, the disciples were gathered together in prayer giving God permission to act in their lives. Fulton Sheen said, *“In the Ascension, Christ took our necessities to the Father; thanks to the Spirit, Christ the Redeemer would be brought into the hearts of all who would believe in Him.”* For St. Paul reminded the Corinthians, *“Clearly, you are a letter from Christ ... This ‘letter’ is written not with pen and ink, but with the Spirit of the living God. It is carved not on tablets of stone, but on human hearts”* (2 Cor 3:3 NLT).