

Sunday and Feast Day Liturgical Notes for Priests and Deacons

Suggestions for Leading Worship



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RE: Liturgical Suggestions for the Solemnity of the Ascension of Our Lord – Cycle A

Sunday date: May 3-4, 2008

Dear Fathers and Deacons,

An Overview...

One must be careful not to read into this Solemnity a historical reminiscence of the event of Jesus' taking His leave of his first disciples. The focus on this feast is not departure; it is on commissioning and sending the apostles and disciples to preach the reign of God. Within all three liturgical cycles, the First and Second Readings remain the same. The Gospel changes with each cycle. As Matthew's Gospel setting is a mountain, there is an indication that what happens here is important – a place of revelation. While there is a profession of faith by the apostles at what they are seeing, there is also the added note of some of them doubting. The coexistence of faith and doubt is Matthew's signal that these will be present in every age. Faith in any age has its own insecurities and problems. Matthew also adds the awareness of *I am "with you" always [Emmanuel]*, referring back to early chapters of Matthew's Gospel which speak of the Messiah's reign.

Faith Sharing Questions...

1. What phase in the Scriptures was most significant for your life? What does this mean for you? For the Church?
2. St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians speaks of knowing that is the hope that belongs to God's call. What does that hope mean in today's world?
3. How does the promise of Jesus "...behold, I am with you always..." speak to you right now?

Some Considerations As You Prepare...

1. As the Presider speaks in the Introductory Rite, care should be taken to relate the mystery of the Ascension to the entire paschal event: the suffering, death, resurrection *and* ascension of the Lord Jesus. The First Preface for Ascension may be a help for these words.
2. If the Penitential Rite is used, invocations could be based on the phrases from the Glory to God which include the paschal/ascension connection. E.g.: Lord Jesus, you take away the sin of the world; Christ Jesus, you are seated at the right hand of the Father; Lord Jesus, you alone are the Most High...
3. The first option for the Opening Prayer is suggested.
4. The first choice for the Preface for Ascension is recommended; it better expresses the imagery of the Scriptures; it carries the style found in the Eater prefaces; the length allows the Presider to build the wording force toward the climax: ...*where he has gone we hope to follow*. The First Ascension Preface also does not point to the abandonment of the Church but Jesus' going forth to prepare a place for all those who one day will join him in the Kingdom.
5. If the Roman Canon is used today, it would include the proper "replacement" parts for use on the Solemnity of the Ascension. The imagery of the Third Eucharistic Prayer is also appropriate.
6. A Solemn Blessing is prescribed in the *Missal*.
7. At one point in history the Easter Candle was extinguished after the proclamation of the Gospel on this day. However, *this is not done now*. The Easter season continues through the Solemnity of Pentecost. The Paschal Candle remains in place.

Looking Ahead...

1. Next Sunday will mark the beginning of the last week of the Easter season! It is time to be thinking about how the Church will experience the environment of Ordinary Time – but only after the Sunday celebrations of Pentecost, Trinity Sunday, and the Body and Blood of Christ.
2. The Solemnity of the Ascension was originally observed on the Thursday of the Sixth Week of Easter. As such, the Church had a focus in between the celebration of the ascension when Christ returned to His Father and that of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit would be poured out upon the disciples. The nine days from that Thursday feast constituted the *original novena*: nine days in which the readings from the Liturgy recount the prayer and patient waiting of the disciples.
3. Pentecost is in two weeks. It might be good to include in the Parish *Bulletin* or website some information about the concept of what a "vigil" is, as Pentecost has its own proper Vigil and not just an "anticipated Mass" the day before. Note that the Vigil has four options for the First reading. The readings from the *Lectionary* for the Sunday Feast of Pentecost are different than for the Vigil. The homilist will need to take that into account.
4. The Pentecost Sequence is to be sung on Sunday. It is the *Veni Sancte Spiritus*. Musicians and cantors need to be alerted to prepare it.
5. It's also not too early to remind the community of various resources to help them find Mass times at the places toward which they may be traveling during summer vacations. A website called www.masstimes.org can be a helpful site.

Sample Prayers of the Faithful for the Ascension of Our Lord

Priest: Within the hope of the Church on pilgrimage toward the fullness of the Kingdom, let us offer these needs to the Lord:

Deacon (or other reader if there is no deacon):

1. For the Church in the world; may the Holy Spirit guide the mission of the Church in proclaiming the Gospel to all peoples; we pray to the Lord.
2. For those who live on the earth in every nation; for breakthroughs in old stalemates, for renewed efforts at making peace instead of war; for hope for those who live in despair; we pray to the Lord.
3. For those who are neophytes; may their faith be strengthened through the witness of our parish community; we pray to the Lord.
4. For the fruitfulness of the Spirit's gifts among the many ministries in our parish, for the sake of our community; we pray to the Lord.
5. For those who have died hoping in the resurrection; for those who have died and whose faith is known to God alone; we pray to the Lord.
6. In peace, we offer our other, silent prayers to the Lord...

[pause; the presider alone concludes]

Priest: Loving God,
You hear the prayer of your people, and
You are always faithful.
Grant these needs,
offered to you in confidence through Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Amen.