Jesu’s ascension is his glorification and exaltation. The Father raises Jesus from the depths of humiliation—his death on the cross—into the glory of heaven. Now seated in “God’s right hand” (cf. Eph 1:20), Jesus shares God’s own life, power, and glory. Though his lordship remains hidden and obscured by life’s daily toils and human inequities, it will eventually prevail. The Father and the Son then send the Holy Spirit to breathe life and constantly renew the face of the earth and human hearts.

With Jesus’ ascension, a new era has begun. It marks the time of the Church, who, filled with the Holy Spirit, continues Jesus’ saving work.

Jesus’ exaltation also points to our heavenly destiny; we now have a place in God! But we do not just wait for the “hereafter” to live it. Pope Benedict XVI says that when we go to Jesus—in whose person God and man are forever and inseparably one—we enter “heaven” already. Heaven, then, is not a place beyond the stars but a person; “ascension into heaven” can take place in our daily lives. Eternal life—“heaven” is to “know Jesus Christ,” the one whom God sent. It is to share his cross—and his glory.

Consequently, Jesus’ departure from the sight of his disciples is not a cause for sorrow as in a permanent goodbye. In fact his “un-presence” is replaced by a new kind of presence, more profound and powerful, which goes beyond the limitations of space and time. No wonder Matthew does not present Jesus as taken up into the clouds; rather, the evangelist focuses on Jesus’ being Immanuel—God who is present among us. Jesus’ last words are a perennial source of comfort to believers of all time: “Behold, I am with you always, until the end of time” (Mt 28:20).

Ascension Sunday is a “great commissioning.” The apostles are being sent out to make disciples of all nations, to baptize, and to teach people to obey Jesus’ commandments.” Ascension inaugurates the mission of the Church.

Ascension Sunday is also World Communications Day (WCD). In our age, we cannot proclaim the Gospel outside of the culture of communications—without digital media. Our connections need to grow into true human encounters that bring warmth and stir hearts of people most especially those who are hurting and looking for salvation or hope. With this kind of witness, then, can we respond and “rise” from the manifold challenges in communications today.

—Fr. Angelo Paolo O. Aspre, SSP

PASTORAL CATECHESIS FOR THE YEAR OF ECUMENISM, INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

Guiding Our Interfaith Dialogue
Fr. James H. Kroeger, MM

Dialogue does not happen between religious systems (e.g. Islam and Christianity). Essentially, dialogue occurs between persons and among communities; dialogue is people-centered and community-oriented. In a word, dialogue is based on the personal “God-experience” of the participants, be they Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, or Hindu.

In this context, a very helpful guideline for Christians can be found in the scripture passage of 1 Peter 3:15-16: “Reverence the Lord Christ in your hearts, and always have your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you all have; but give it with courtesy and respect and with a clear conscience.” Indeed, this passage emphasizes both one’s love and fidelity to Christ the source of hope as well as a courteous, respectful witnessing of one’s faith before others.

When Pope John Paul II visited the Philippines in February 1981, he spoke some challenging words that promote interfaith respect, dialogue, and service. “Christians will, moreover, join hands with all men and women of good will who share a belief in the inestimable dignity of each human person. They will work together to bring about a more just and peaceful society in which the poor will be the first to be served.” Indeed, dialogue and service go hand-in-hand.
Entrance Antiphon (Acts 1:11)
(Recited when there is no opening song.)

Men of Galilee, why gaze in wonder at the heavens? This Jesus whom you saw ascending into heaven will return as you saw him go, alleluia.

Greeting
(The sign of the cross is made here.)

P — The Lord be with you.
All — And with your spirit.

Introduction
(These or similar words may be used to address the assembly.)

P — Today we celebrate the Solemnity of the Lord’s Ascension. Jesus’ return to the Father marks the end of his public ministry and appearance to the disciples after his resurrection. But he really does not leave his disciples. Through his gift of the Holy Spirit, he accompanies them in their task of preaching the Good News, even as they build communities of disciples.

Today, too, is the 54th World Communications Day which centers on its theme: “That you may tell your children and grandchildren” (Ex 10:2): Life Becomes History.

Penitential Act

P — Brethren (brothers and sisters), let us acknowledge our sins, and so prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries.
(Pause)

P — Have mercy on us, O Lord.
All — For we have sinned against you.

P — Show us, O Lord, your mercy.
All — And grant us your salvation.

P — May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.
All — Amen.

Gloria

All — Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will. We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you, we give you thanks for your great glory,

Lord God, heavenly King, O God, almighty Father, Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son, Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us; you take away the sins of the world, receive our prayer; you are seated at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on us. For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Collect

P — Let us pray. (Pause)
Gladden us with holy joys, almighty God, and make us rejoice with devout thanksgiving, for the Ascension of Christ your Son is our exaltation, and, where the Head has gone before in glory, the Body is called to follow in hope.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.
All — Amen.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

First Reading (Acts 1:1–11) (Sit)

The Holy Spirit will come and he will empower the apostles to proclaim and bear witness to the Gospel, from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

A reading from the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles

IN THE FIRST BOOK, Thessalonians, I dealt with all that Jesus did and taught until the day he was taken up, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. He presented himself alive to them by many proofs after he had suffered, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While meeting with them, he enjoined them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for “the promise of the Father about which you have heard me speak; for John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

When they had gathered together they asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” He answered them, “It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has established by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” When he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him from their sight. While they were looking intently at the sky as he was going, suddenly two men dressed in white garments stood beside them. They said, “Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven.”

— The word of the Lord.
All — Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm (Ps 47)

R — God mounts his throne to shouts of joy: a bale of trumpets for the Lord.

A

1. All you peoples, clap your hands/shout to God with cries of gladness,/ For the Lord, the Most High, the awesome,/ is the great king over all the earth. (R)

2. God mounts his throne amid shouts of joy:/ the Lord, amid trumpet blasts:/ Sing praise to God, sing praise:/ sing praise to our king, sing praise. (R)

3. For king of all the earth is God;/ sing hymns of praise./
God reigns over the nations. God sits upon his holy throne. (R)

Second Reading (Eph 1:17–23)

God seats Jesus at his right hand in the heavens and dispenses varied gifts meant for the building up of the body of Christ.

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians

BROTHERS AND SISTERS:

May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give you a Spirit of wisdom and revelation resulting in knowledge of him. May the eyes of your hearts be enlightened, that you may know what is the hope that belongs to his call, what are the riches of glory in his inheritance among the holy ones, and what is the surpassing greatness of his power for us who believe, in accord with the exercise of his great might, which he worked in Christ, raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavens, far above every principality, authority, power, and dominion, and every name that is named not only in this age but also in the one to come.

And he put all things beneath his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way.

— The word of the Lord.

All — Thanks be to God.

Alleluia (Mt 28:19a, 20b)

(Stand)

All — Alleluia, alleluia. Go and teach all nations, says the Lord; I am with you always, until the end of the world. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel (Mt 28:16–20)

P — A reading from the conclusion of the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

All — Glory to you, O Lord.

THE ELEVEN DISCIPLES went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. When they saw him, they worshipped him, but they doubted. Then Jesus approached and said to them, “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.

— The Gospel of the Lord.

All — Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Homily (Sit)

Profession of Faith (Stand)

All — I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,

(At the words that follow, up to and including the Virgin Mary, all bow.)

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

Prayer of the Faithful

P — Jesus Christ lives forever and seated at the right hand of the Father. Through him, we pray to the Father for the needs of the Church and say:

R — Father of glory, hear our prayer.

C — That the Lord may shower the Church with his gifts, and may these gifts be used for building the body of Christ, we pray: (R)

C — That the Church may continue to proclaim the message of Christ through the fastest and most effective means, we pray: (R)

C — That the communications media may seek and contribute constructively to the propagation of all that is good and true, we pray: (R)

C — Father, send your Holy Spirit to comfort the sick and the dying, and to give eternal life to those who have died. We pray: (R)

C — Let us pray for the urgent concerns of our community and our personal intentions (pause). We pray: (R)

P — Lord God, your Son goes back to you to share your glory. Our eyes can no longer see him, but we see him with the eyes of faith, and continue to love him. Make us serve him by bringing the Good News to the men and women of today, especially through the communications media.

We ask this through the same Christ our Lord.

All — Amen.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist

Presentation of the Gifts

P — Pray, brethren...

All — May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of his name, for our good and the good of all his holy Church.

Prayer over the Offerings

(Stand)

P — We offer sacrifice now in supplication, O Lord, to honor the wondrous Ascension of your Son: grant, we pray, that through this most holy exchange we, too, may rise up to the heavenly realms.

Through Christ our Lord.

All — Amen.

Preface of II of the Ascension of the Lord

P — The Lord be with you.

All — And with your spirit.

P — Lift up your hearts.

All — We lift them up to the Lord.

P — Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All — It is right and just.

P — It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Christ our Lord.

For after his Resurrection
he plainly appeared to all 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 and even the heavenly Powers, with the angelic hosts, sing together the unending hymn of your glory, as they acclaim:

All — Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. (Kneel)

Acclamation (Stand)

All — When we eat this Bread and drink this Cup, we proclaim your Death, O Lord, until you come again.

THE COMMUNION RITE

The Lord’s Prayer

All — Our Father...
P — Deliver us, Lord...
All — For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and for ever.

Invitation to Peace

Invitation to Communion (Kneel)

P — Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.

All — Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.

Prayer for World Communications Day

(The following prayer may be recited together or privately immediately after Communion.)

All — Lord God, to communicate your love to men and women, you sent your only Son Jesus Christ into the world and made him our Master, the Way and Truth and Life of humanity. Grant that the media of social communications—press, films, radio, television, records, and always be used for your glory and the good of all.

Raise up vocations for this multimedia apostolate, and inspire all people of goodwill to contribute with prayer, action, and offerings, so that through these means the Church may preach the Gospel to all peoples. Amen.

Communion Antiphon

(Mt 28:20)

Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age, alleluia.

Prayer after Communion (Stand)

P — Let us pray. (Pause)

Almighty ever-living God, who allow those on earth to celebrate divine mysteries, grant, we pray, that Christian hope may draw us onward to where our nature is united with you.

Through Christ our Lord.

All — Amen.

THE CONCLUDING RITES

P — The Lord be with you. All — And with your spirit.

Solemn Blessing

P — Bow down for the blessing. (Pause)
P — May almighty God bless you, for on this very day his Only Begotten Son pierced the heights of heaven and unlocked for you the way to ascend to where he is.

All — Amen.
P — May he grant that, as Christ after his Resurrection was seen plainly by his disciples, so when he comes as Judge he may show himself merciful to you for all eternity.

All — Amen.
P — And may you, who believe he is seated with the Father in his majesty, know with joy the fulfillment of his promise to stay with you until the end of time.

All — Amen.
P — And may the blessing of almighty God, the Father, and the Son, (†) and the Holy Spirit, come down on you and remain with you for ever.

All — Amen.

Dismissal

P — Go forth, the Mass is ended.

All — Thanks be to God.