

The Ascension of the Lord  
May 24, 2009  
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## "God Mounts His Throne..."

Acts 1:1-11  
Psalm 47  
Ephesians 1:17-23  
Mark 16:15-20

How many of you have ever been given a Scripture verse as a penance in confession and when you sat down to read the passage it made absolutely *no* sense? I love giving people Scripture verses as penance in the Sacrament of Reconciliation! I think Scripture can be an awesome way for us to be invited into the healing that is an integral part of the Sacrament. The Psalms, in particular, can be a great spiritual resource for us when we need a renewed experience of God's central role in our lives. However, I am sometimes concerned about suggesting a Scripture passage, especially a Psalm, for several reasons.

First, the Psalms are not numbered the same in all Bibles. Those Bibles that use the Greek translation of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint, divide up the Psalms differently than translations based on the Hebrew Psalter.<sup>1</sup> In the Septuagint, Psalms 9 and 10, as well as Psalms 114 and 115 are combined into one Psalm. To further confound things, Psalms 116 and 147 are split into two separate Psalms. This means that if I give someone a Psalm to read that falls between Psalm 9:22 and Psalm 146:11, they may or may not read what I had in mind! Also, some translations of the Bible count the superscriptions as the first verse of the Psalm and others do not.<sup>2</sup> So, even if the person finds the same Psalm that I was suggesting, they might not read the verses that I intended!

Another reason why it can be difficult to give someone a Psalm or a Scripture passage for penance or meditation is because there are so many different ways that a person can read the Bible. For example, our Psalm reading today—Psalm 47 (or 46 for some of you!)—can be read in many different ways. Four popular interpretations of this Psalm include—historical, cultic, eschatological,<sup>3</sup> and Christological. Get out your missalette and turn to the Psalm today. If we were to read this Psalm from a historical perspective, we would be interested in knowing what historical event led to the celebration that is described. Obviously, the people were excited about something God had done, possibly something He had done through an earthly king. God had shown His kingship to His people, but what exactly had He done? When did He do it?

If we read the same Psalm from the cultic perspective, then we are less interested in the original event and more interested in how the people celebrated that event every year by reciting this Psalm on the way to the Temple. In this way, the cultic interpretation assumes that this Psalm is a part of an ancient liturgy of the enthronement of Yahweh and it desires to explore what that liturgy was like.

An eschatological reading of the same Psalm gives us a slightly different view. It is interested in how *Elyon*—the Most High—will rule for ever as King of all creation. It is interested in how, in the end of time, every king on earth will be humbled and subjected to God's

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<sup>1</sup> The New American Bible translates the Psalms from the Hebrew Psalter.

<sup>2</sup> The numbering of the verses in the New American Bible follows the Hebrew numbering.

<sup>3</sup> Eschatology is the study of the "end times."

rule. In the words of the Psalm, “God reigns over the nations” (Psalm 47:8). The Christological interpretation of the Psalm takes this one step further considers Christ as the fulfillment of this prophetic, eschatological view.

Reading the Psalms from a Christological vantage point was a very popular approach to Scripture for the early Christians. Beginning even as early as the New Testament writers, we read how the Old Testament was interpreted in light of Christ’s life, death and Resurrection.<sup>4</sup> It is from this perspective that the Church invites us to read Psalm 47 today! Christ is Elyon, the Most High, who has ascended to His throne to shouts and cries of gladness and the clapping of hands. It is He who sits upon the eternal throne, receiving our praise and ruling over all creation. All six of the “Enthronement Psalms”<sup>5</sup> foreshadow Christ’s glorious Ascension into heaven as the “King of kings and Lord of lords” (1 Timothy 6:13b).

Despite the fact that we may not be conscious of it, I’m fairly certain that most of us are predisposed to reading Scripture in a particular way, from a particular vantage point. This means that the next time a priest gives us a Scripture passage as a penance and it doesn’t make any sense, we might ask the Lord to show us a different perspective on the passage.

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<sup>4</sup> The Letter to the Hebrews has numerous examples of Christological interpretation of Old Testament passages.

<sup>5</sup> Psalms 47, 93, 96-99