

The Festival of the Ascension of Our Lord
St. Mark 16:14-20
14 May, Anno Domini 2026

Citizens of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ who has ascended above all things and taken His rightful seat as the ruler of all things in heaven and on earth,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

It is very easy to get caught up in all the political machinations of the day and to wring our hands over what President Trump or the rulers of other nations or the rich and powerful are doing. It's easy to spend hours doom scrolling around the internet listening to talking heads pontificating about all the terrible things that are going to happen if we don't do x,y, and z. Men have forever been trying to redraw the map to enlarge their power and their wealth. This is exactly what Samuel warned the Israelites about when they insisted that they needed to have a king like their pagan neighbors. They foolishly imagined that the king would do all the work and take all the risk so that they could sit back and enjoy life. Instead, the kings of the earth, with very rare exception have done exactly what Samuel foretold - take and take and take: sons to fight wars, daughters to serve, fields to enrich his friends, grain to feed his armies, servants and livestock, and either literally or figuratively, turn their subjects into slaves who work and provide above all for the ever-hungry state.

But the kings of men are only weak and broken reflections and one day they will answer to another for how they carried out their charge. There is only one King and to Him belongs all authority in heaven and on earth. Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, who has overthrown the devil's kingdom and swallowed up death by dying and rising again from the dead on the third day, forty days after His resurrection, was taken out of the sight of the disciples to sit on the eternal throne of God. All things are now under His feet. And His feet are just like your feet: feet of flesh, feet that were caked with mud and dust as He walked this earth preaching and healing, feet that were pierced with the Roman nails that held Him to the cross. There, nailed to the cross, Jesus waged war against the only actually enemies of humanity - the sin that separated us from God and condemned us to eternal judgment, the devil who never ceases day or night to resubjugate us to slavery with his lies, and death which would swallow us up forever in the fires of God's wrath. God's only-begotten Son died so that you might be set free from these, your true enemies, and instead live before Him in His kingdom which has no end, serving Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, blessedness.

And this kingdom of Christ Jesus is nothing like any earthly kingdom. That is seen clearly from its inception on Good Friday and the charge of the King which is so beautifully and simply set before us by St. Mark. When the Lord Jesus sent out His official emissaries, the apostles, what did He command them? He could have commanded them

to go and overthrow all earthly powers and set up one Christian kingdom on earth. He could have demanded tribute and protection money from all people. He could have justly imprisoned or even executed all who reject His reign. But He does none of these things. Instead, Jesus commands the apostles to speak, to preach the good news of salvation to absolutely everyone, to every last nook and cranny of creation. "Go tell the world," Jesus said "that I have triumphed over the devil and his kingdom. I have disarmed him by receiving against Myself every accusation of sin that could have poured out of his lips against you. I have opened to all people the gates of heaven by offering My holy, precious Blood and My innocent suffering and death." Glory to God in the highest for showing such mercy to us poor, miserable wretches who don't deserve even the tiniest crumb of good from God!

And what is perhaps most amazing of all is how one enters this kingdom. We would certainly expect to have to give or pay or sacrifice something to obtain citizenship in a kingdom that cost the Son of God His life to obtain for us. It would make sense if God should only open this kingdom to the best and brightest, to those who first demonstrated a strict adherence to a rigorous code of behavior or somehow proved themselves worthy. We might think that we would have to uproot our lives and move to some holier land. But Jesus makes no such requirements. Just the opposite. He sends the kingdom out into all the world by sending the Gospel. He does not demand the overthrow of worldly governments. He confirms them and commands us to continue to order ourselves under them. The divine King commands the Gospel to be preached in every language under heaven, under the rule of all kinds of governments, to those of every station and economic status, to men, women, and children. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is to be proclaimed to everyone everywhere without exception.

And those who are admitted into the kingdom of heaven are those who believe that Jesus has already done everything for them and gives eternal life as a gift to poor, miserable sinners precisely because they themselves could never deserve or obtain it. Those who believe the apostolic witness to Christ, everyone, anyone who believes this witness to be true and receives the washing of Holy Baptism which Christ commanded has this unequivocal and clear promise from the King Jesus Christ Himself - they will be saved. No one gets into the kingdom of God on their merits or their efforts. No one gets in because they are smarter, holier, or more liked in the world. No one gets in because they were brought up in the church, went to a Christian school, and were confirmed thirty years ago. None of those are faith. The kingdom of God is only entered into by faith. The only ones who are in the kingdom of God, the only ones who will be saved, are those who hear the preaching of the Gospel, despair of their own righteousness, and believe that the Son of God shed His Blood on the cross for their sins. And when you believe this, when you believe all that Christ commanded, as we see happen time and again throughout the book of Acts, faith leads immediately to Holy Baptism whereby the Lord Jesus Christ snatches you out of the devil's tyranny, purifies you from all the uncleanness of your sin and your false gods, breaks the chains of your slavery, buries you into the death of Jesus, and

raises you to new life as a citizen of His kingdom, and not only a citizen, but a beloved child and heir.

It is precisely this for which we pray every time we cry out to our Father “Thy kingdom come.” We are praying that the apostolic witness would be preserved among us and that by the power of the Holy Spirit we would believe that witness with every last fiber of our being, that we would live according the citizenship granted in Holy Baptism, drowning every sinful desire, hating even the garment stained by the flesh, setting aside all anger and rivalries and jealousies and dissensions and divisions; that we would instead live lives of humility and selfless love, lives of sacrifice, lives of piety and devotion, lives anchored in and defined by the Word of Him who both created and redeemed us purely out of Fatherly divine goodness and mercy.

This is exactly why the kingdom of God is hated and rejected by so much of the world. It excludes merit entirely. It is a humble kingdom that humbles the proud and gives grace to the lowly. It is not impressed by anything that man calls great or holy or good. Indeed, what captures the eyes of men is an abomination in the sight of the Lord. Nicodemus couldn't see the kingdom of God because he loved his own righteousness and thought God did too. The notion that he should have to die and be born again of water and the Word in Holy Baptism was unthinkable foolishness. But unless you become like a little child, the weakest of all, unless you count all that you have and are as loss and trust in NOTHING except the righteousness of Jesus Christ, you will never enter the kingdom of God.

Do not be fooled by your deceitful flesh or the pomp and glory of the world. The kingdom of God, as infinitely grand as it is, is in this life still as small and despised as a grain of mustard seed. You do not see it but you hear it. You hear the proclamation of the Gospel which Christ attaches to the sacraments that sinners may receive them in faith. And wherever that Gospel is purely preached and the sacraments are faithfully administered according to Christ's institution, there you can be certain that the kingdom of God is, as indeed, God has answered our prayer this again this day and sent His kingdom of grace and mercy into our midst. And not only here, where we gather together corporately as the family of God, but also in your home as you open the Scriptures and read them to your family and talk about them and call upon God in prayer. There Christ, your King, promises to be in your midst. There the kingdom of the devil is driven back as you study the Scriptures, as you bury the chief articles of the faith deep in your heart by memorizing the commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the chief texts which treat of Baptism, the Office of the Keys, and the Sacrament of the Altar.

And as the kingdom of God advances in this way, the kingdom of the devil is driven back and you are strengthened to live in this world as citizens of heaven. The world will despise and hate you for it. The devil will still mount his attacks. Even your own flesh will seek to lead you back into the kingdom of death from which you have been freed. But do

not fear them. Their authority is limited and whatever their plans, whatever they think they are doing, their plans will come to nothing. Jesus is the true and only King whose will will be done. He is a gracious and merciful King who wants all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth and so be included in His Kingdom. Jesus alone has all authority. And by that authority He has caused you to hear the Gospel in faith and be washed in Holy Baptism. And to all who are so blessed this promise stands - you will be saved.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all human understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord.