

Readings: Acts 1: 1 – 11; Psalm 46 (47); **EITHER** Ephesians 1: 17 – 23
OR Hebrews 9:24 – 28 and 10: 19 – 23; Luke 24: 46 – 53.

Today's Reflection for the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord is based on the alternative second reading from the Letter to the Hebrews. The unknown author of Hebrews is concerned to show that the life, death and glorification of Jesus fulfils and replaces the temple, priesthood and sacrifices described in the Old Testament.

Chapter 16 of the book of Leviticus describes the ceremonial of the annual Day of Atonement. On this day each year the high priest was to enter the Holy of Holies through the curtain, taking some of the blood of the bull and the goat which had been sacrificed as offerings for his own sins and the sins of the people of Israel. He was to sprinkle the blood on and before the mercy seat, which was the throne of the invisible God of Israel. Some recent studies have shown that this innermost shrine was decorated in a way which represented the heavenly court of God, and that the curtain, woven of the same materials as the high priest's robe, represented the created universe.

In the verses before our reading the author has been reminding his hearers that '*under the (Old Testament) law, almost everything is purified by blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins*'. Now he teaches that Christ's offering excelled that of the Old Testament: First, the sanctuary in which he offered was not a mere representation, *but it was heaven itself*. Secondly, his offering did not need to be repeated; it was all-sufficient.

Thirdly, it was not animal's blood that he offered, but his own, shed on the cross and now brought into *the actual presence of God on our behalf*.

So Christ's self-offering has achieved what the Old Testament sacrifices could not. *He has made his appearance once and for all...to do away with sin*.

A consequence of Christ's self-offering is that we are not kept from the presence of God – as the people were under the Old Covenant by a material curtain.

Instead, the incarnate and ascended Christ has *opened for us a living opening* into God's presence. His glorified body is the means by which we can come to the Father.

Still for us he intercedes. Alleluia!

His prevailing death he pleads. Alleluia!