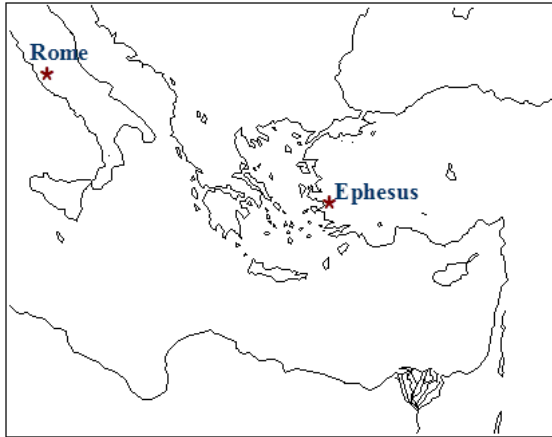


## PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

### THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD – YEAR A

#### Second Reading Ephesians 1: 12–23



The author of the Letter to the Ephesians is addressing new Gentile converts. They were a religious minority in Asia Minor and were shunned, sometimes persecuted. The writer prays that they come to a gradual appreciation

of what God can offer them. The 'knowledge' of God mentioned here is not so much a matter of being conversant with facts, it is more an experience of what God's love and his power working through us can do.

The objective here is that the new converts should achieve an inner conviction (*'the eyes of your mind'*) that life is worth continuing with despite persecutions (*'the hope his call holds of you'*) and a mature awareness of the inheritance they share with the Christian Jews (*'the rich glories'* they will inherit).

The 'Saints' in Paul's letters are not people who are dead and have been canonised by the Church; rather they are the Christians who have accepted the Lord Jesus Christ and worship him.



Sovereignty, Authority, Power or domination ... all of these words serve to reinforce the all-embracing power of God at work in Christ, revealed in his resurrection and ascension. His reign is here and now: *'he has put all things under his feet'* (a quotation from Psalm 8: 6).



#### Gospel Matthew 28: 16–20

These four verses constitute the end of Matthew's Gospel, recording the last recorded encounter between Jesus and his disciples, and Jesus's last words to them. Matthew does not describe Jesus's ascension.

##### The mountain in Galilee

Matthew does not name the mountain. However, it seems to be the same area as the places in Galilee mentioned earlier in the Gospel: the mountain in the Temptations (4: 8); the location of the Sermon on the Mount (5: 1); and the place where the Transfiguration happened (17: 1). Mountains have a symbolic value too: they are usually places that are difficult to access. By arranging to meet the disciples in Galilee, Jesus implicitly invites them to remember the beginning of their journey together.

##### The disciples' reaction: worship and doubt

Their reactions are in line with the way they behaved during the resurrection appearances: some were overcome, others doubted. However, some scholars point out that the original Greek could imply not that there were two distinct groups of people (the worshippers and the doubters); but rather the phrase could mean 'they worshipped but had doubts'.

##### The Great Commission

This is the name traditionally given to the three sayings of Jesus given below. It is a concise description of what the Early Church considered its role to be, and it acts by virtue of this commission. It is given to all disciples and to us, even if we, like them, sometimes have doubts or hesitations.

##### \* *All authority has been given to me*

Jesus shows his authority over nature (the calming of the storm 4: 35–41) and over spirits (the Gerasene demoniac 5: 1–21). God is the source of his authority, as Jesus mentioned earlier in his ministry (11: 27).

##### \* *Make disciples of all the nations*

Whereas Matthew's main audience is made up of Jewish people, Jesus now seeks to reach all nationalities and races.

##### \* *Baptise and teach them*

The disciples' work is clearly defined. They are to do this in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Greek word for 'baptise' also means to immerse, not necessarily in water. Through their teaching of the Christian way of life, the disciples are to immerse their new followers in the presence of God, which is above them (the Father), beside them (the Son), and within them (the Spirit).

##### I am with you always

The last words of Matthew's Gospel take us back to its beginning. At the Annunciation (cf. 4th Sunday of Advent), Matthew records, 'They shall name him Emmanuel, which means God is with us' (1: 24).