

# New Testament Catechesis

## *Learn by Heart for the Year:*

The Books of the New Testament

The Lord's Prayer

Confession and the Office of the Keys

Table of Duties:

Of Civil Government

Of Citizens

## **Lesson 1      The Ascension—The Lord Gives the Apostolic Ministry to His Church**

***Bible Reading:*** Acts 1:1-26  
Ephesians 2:19-22; 4:8, 11-15

***Learn by Heart:*** The names of the first nineteen books of the New Testament in order: the gospels and Acts, and the epistles of Paul.

### ***New Testament Terms:***

gospels	disciple
epistles	witnesses
the gospels and Acts	apostles
the epistles of Paul	prophets
the catholic epistles and Revelation	evangelists
The Ascension of Our Lord	the Twelve
the Promise of the Father	

### ————— *To the Catechist* —————

### ***Central Thoughts***

- ◆ God the Father exalted Jesus in the ascension because Jesus faithfully suffered and died for our sins out of love for His Father and us.
- ◆ The apostles were chosen by Jesus to bear witness to His death and resurrection before the world.
- ◆ The New Testament Scriptures were inspired by the Holy Spirit and written under the authority of the apostles.
- ◆ The Church and her ministers are bound to the authority of the apostolic Scriptures in all preaching, teaching, and administration of the sacraments.
- ◆ Jesus is still present with His Church wherever His Gospel is preached and His sacraments are administered.

### *Key Questions and Answers*

Who wrote the book of Acts? *Luke.*

What office did Luke hold? *Evangelist.*

What was the “former account” Luke had made? *The Gospel of Luke.*

What did the Gospel of Luke contain? *All that Jesus did and taught.*

What does the name “Theophilus” mean? *Lover of God.*

What does the word “apostle” mean? *A man sent out on behalf of another with the authority of the one who sent him.*

What proofs did Jesus show the apostles that He was risen from the dead? *The wounds in His hands and side; they could touch His body; He ate and drank with them; He taught them; they could see Him with their own eyes.*

How many days were there between Jesus’ resurrection and ascension? *40 days.*

What did God promise them in the water of their baptism? *The gift of the Holy Spirit.*

What were the apostles told to do in Jerusalem? *To wait for the Holy Spirit to come upon them so that they could be His faithful witnesses.*

What did the apostles want to know? *When Jesus would restore the kingdom to Israel.*

What kind of kingdom were the apostles thinking of? *An earthly kingdom.*

How does Jesus answer them? *The Father alone would know “times and seasons” for establishing His kingdom.*

What kingdom is Jesus speaking of? *The kingdom of God, or the Church.*

How does God’s kingdom come? *See Catechism: “When our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word ...”*

What were the apostles told to do after the Holy Spirit would come upon them? *Be witnesses to Jesus in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*

How do the apostles continue to bear witness to Jesus today? *Through the apostolic Word of the New Testament that is preached and taught in the Church throughout the world.*

What happened to Jesus after He had spoken to the apostles? *He was taken up into heaven and a cloud received Him out of their sight.*

What does the cloud remind us of from the Old Testament? *The pillar of cloud and the glory of God that hovered over the tabernacle and that led the children of Israel through the wilderness.*

Who were the two men that appeared to the apostles? *Angels or messengers.*

What do the angels promise the apostles? *Jesus will come again in glory, even as He ascended into heaven in glory.*

Did Jesus leave His apostles and the Church when He ascended into heaven? *No. He is with us always, “even to the end of the age,” as He promised. See Matthew 28:20.*

How does Jesus continue to be present among us? *Through the preaching of the Gospel and the celebration of the Sacraments.*

Why were the names of the eleven apostles important? *The Church needed to know that they were the men whom Jesus had chosen to be the witnesses of His death and resurrection.*

*Through them, Jesus would give His authoritative Word to the Church.*

Where did the apostles gather? *In the upper room in Jerusalem.*

Who gathered with them? *The women, Jesus' mother Mary, and His brothers.*  
What did the apostles do? *They continued together in prayer, waiting for the Holy Spirit.*  
Did Jesus ask them to fill Judas's office? *No.*  
Who calls apostles? *Jesus chooses His apostles directly.*  
What had the apostles been instructed to do? *Wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit.*  
Whom did the Church select to fill Judas's office? *Matthias.*  
What qualifications did Peter prescribe for Judas's replacement? *He had to have accompanied the apostles from the baptism of John to the day of Jesus' ascension.*  
Of what was the new apostle to bear witness? *Jesus' resurrection.*  
Whom would Jesus later choose to be His apostle? *Saul of Tarsus who became the Apostle Paul.*

### ***Catechesis Summary***

Under the apostolic authority of the Apostle Paul, the evangelist St. Luke wrote the Acts of the Apostles to Theophilus, which means “lover of God.” Theophilus could have been the name of an actual person, but it certainly is a reference to any Christian who “loves God” by faith in Jesus Christ. The book of Acts is a continuation of Luke’s Gospel in which the acts and preaching of Jesus continue in the world after His ascension through the ministry of the apostles. The apostles were the men Jesus had chosen to preach His Gospel and be the eyewitnesses of all that He had said and done. They were sent out on His behalf to preach His Gospel to the world and to establish the Church upon His authoritative Word. Jesus promised them the gift of the Holy Spirit (the Promise of the Father), so that they would faithfully bear witness to everything He had taught them and everything they had witnessed in His ministry, death, and resurrection. The Church received the New Testament Scriptures from the apostles, under whose authority they were written. Jesus had promised His apostolic ministers, “He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me” (Matthew 10:40). The Church is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets [the Old and New Testament Scriptures], Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:20). The Church does not exist and has no life apart from the apostolic and prophetic Scriptures. Every minister and congregation is bound to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments for all that is taught, believed, and practiced in the Church. The office of the apostolic ministry was Christ’s gift to His Church at His ascension, whereby He would continue to govern His Church through preaching, teaching, and the sacraments. Quoting from the book of Psalms, the Apostle Paul teaches that the apostolic ministry, including the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers, was Christ’s gift to the Church when He ascended into heaven: “‘When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men . . .’ And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God . . .” (Ephesians 4:8, 11-13a). Jesus instructed the apostles to WAIT in Jerusalem for the promised Holy Spirit before beginning their work. Waiting always involves prayer and meditation upon the sacred texts of Holy Scripture. By the very Word of Jesus that they had received, the Holy Spirit would be poured out upon the apostles at Pentecost and their preaching ministry would begin. The Holy Spirit comes to us also only through the Word of

God. Apostolic preaching is bound to the Scriptures and calls us to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 24:46-49).

Jesus' ascension into heaven marks His exaltation by God the Father for having redeemed us from sin, death, and the power of Satan. Through His humiliating suffering and death upon the cross, Jesus accomplished our salvation, opened the gates of heaven for us by the forgiveness of all our sins, and reconciled us to God the Father. Jesus had humbled Himself for our salvation. He was obedient to the Father, even to the point of suffering the punishment that we deserved for our sins. He is risen from the dead and, in His ascension, is exalted by God the Father because His death satisfied God's wrath and the condemnation of the Law against sinful man. Since His death won forgiveness of sins, He had to rise from the dead. It was impossible for death to hold Him in the grave. As the catechism teaches, "Where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation." The Father received Jesus' sacrifice for our salvation, and in the ascension the Father exalted Jesus to His right hand for having finished His work. Jesus received from God the Father all the glory and power He had set aside in His humiliation. His ascension should not be thought of as a journey to a far away place, but rather as the King who is now ascending His throne after having triumphed over His enemies. Now our Lord continues to rule all things for the sake of His Church. His Church and every Christian is seated with Jesus in victory at the Father's right hand. All the enemies of sin, death, Satan, and hell are under our feet. Jesus is "King of kings" and "Lord of lords." He has not gone away to some far off place. He reigns in our hearts by the Holy Spirit and faith, He rules in the Church by His Word, and He establishes His kingdom wherever His Gospel is preached and His sacraments are administered according to the apostolic and prophetic Scriptures. Though He has ascended into the heavenly realm, Jesus is still present with us by the Holy Spirit through preaching and sacraments. As the disciples gazed into heaven at His ascension, so His Church looks forward to His Second Coming in glory when He will raise us up from the dead to share fully in the glory of His resurrection and ascension in the life everlasting.

#### ***"Learn by Heart" Catechism Connection***

The books of the New Testament, written under apostolic authority, are inspired by the Holy Spirit according to the Lord's promise to the apostles: "The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (John 14:26).

#### ***Additional New Testament Terms:***

St. Andrew, Apostle  
St. Thomas, Apostle  
St. John, Apostle and Evangelist  
St. Matthias, Apostle  
St. Philip and St. James, Apostles

St. Peter and St. Paul, Apostles  
St. James the Elder, Apostle  
St. Bartholomew, Apostle  
St. Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist  
St. Simon and St. Jude, Apostles

## Excursus on the “Name of Jesus”

The “name of Jesus” (or variations on this phrase) occurs 30 times in the book of Acts. Its first occurrences are at the beginning and end of Peter’s sermon on Pentecost where Peter links the “name of the LORD” in the prophecy from Joel to the person of Jesus at the conclusion of the sermon. “And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the *name of the Lord* shall be saved” (Acts 2:21) and “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this *Jesus*, whom you crucified, *both Lord and Christ*” (Acts 2:36). Peter’s sermon clearly “names” Jesus “the LORD”—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the great “I AM” of the promise of salvation whose “name” was revealed to Moses and the house of Israel at the burning bush. This “Jesus” who is “the Lord” is also the “Christ,” the promised redeemer of all the nations.

“In the name of Jesus,” “in the name of the Lord,” or “in Jesus’ name” is used in the book of Acts as a kind of shorthand for the content of the apostolic doctrine. It indicates who Jesus is, what He has done, and that He is the saving content of the Gospel’s message. The apostles preach, teach, baptize, and forgive sins “in the name of Jesus Christ.” This expression indicates that Christ Jesus, the crucified and risen Lord, is the content of their message and the source of forgiveness they proclaim. Hence, it is said that they “preach forgiveness in Jesus’ name” or “baptize in the name of the Lord.” Such expressions do not mean that a specific liturgical formula was used in their preaching and teaching that invoked “Jesus’ name” but rather that Jesus Christ was the content and source of the message they preached, the baptisms they performed, and the sins they forgave.

This helps us understand Peter’s teaching concerning Baptism on Pentecost, when he said to the multitude, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized *in the name of Jesus Christ* for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). This does not mean that the baptisms performed on Pentecost were not performed “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” but rather that baptism performed in the name of the Triune God *is* baptism into the name of Jesus who is the Lord and Christ of God and the saving content of Baptism.

We often use the phrase “in the name of Jesus” still today. If a pastor were to say, “I preach to you in the name of Jesus Christ the forgiveness of sins,” he is not simply reciting a formula. The expression means that the call to repentance from sin, Jesus’ death for sins, and Jesus’ resurrection for the sinner’s justification is the content of the message he preaches. The “name of Jesus” stands for the content of the Gospel’s message.

This understanding of the phrases that employ the “name of Jesus” in the book of Acts has its origin in Jesus’ catechesis of the apostles from the Old Testament Scriptures: “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached *in His name* to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46-47). “Jesus’ name” is more than a formula. All that Jesus did and said according to the Scriptures stands behind His name.

## Brief Excursus on Holy Baptism in the New Testament

We believe in one Lord, one faith, and one Baptism for the remission of sins (Ephesians 4:5 and the Nicene Creed). Throughout the New Testament, there is a unity and continuity to baptism administered by John, the disciples of Jesus, and later by the Church.

John preached repentance for the forgiveness of sins and directed people to the coming Savior, the “Lamb of God” who would take away the sins of the world and bestow His Holy Spirit. People who were brought to repentance through John’s preaching came out to him to be baptized, confessing their sins. He baptized repentant sinners for the forgiveness of all their sins in Jesus’ name.

Jesus’ disciples continued to baptize after John’s death, saying, “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Those who were brought to repentance by Jesus’ preaching were baptized by His disciples because they believed in Him for the forgiveness of sins.

When Jesus ascended into heaven, He taught that Holy Baptism should continue, saying, “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 things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

From Pentecost forward, the apostles and ministers of the Church continued to baptize repentant sinners for the forgiveness of sins. Holy Baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is “baptism in the name of Jesus” because Jesus the Lord and His saving death and resurrection *is* the content of Holy Baptism in the name of the Triune God. When John baptized sinners they were promised the gift of the Holy Spirit “in Jesus’ name.” This promise came to fruition on Pentecost and in the ongoing administration of Holy Baptism.