

**Contemplating Those Mighty Acts:
The Journey From Holy Week to Pentecost**

The Rev. M. Dion Thompson



By Way Of Introduction

The technical term for Easter in the ancient Church was Pascha, a Greek word derived from the Hebrew pesakh, or 'Passover.' Our English name for the feast is borrowed from an old pagan festival of the Anglo-Saxons in honor of their goddess of spring, Eostre. Although the Jewish Passover celebration lasted but one week, the early Christians extended their observance over the whole fifty-day period to and including Pentecost. The season was considered a commemoration not only of the Resurrection, but also of all 'those mighty acts' by which our Lord brought redemption to men – the new Passover from the bondage of sin and the assurance of new life and eternal victory in the Kingdom of God.

Massey H. Shepherd, Jr., Oxford American Prayer Book Commentary

For God Alone My Soul In Silence Waits; From Him Comes My Salvation
Psalm 62:1

1) Not To Be Served, But To Serve

We begin in a room. Darkness abounds. The powers of man are conspiring to destroy him whom we have come to hold dear. There is fear and foreboding. Then Jesus does this mysterious act.

“After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and returned to the table, he said to them. ‘Do you know what I have done to you?’” – John 13:12

2) Down At The Cross

Two criminals. Two perspectives. Is God with us? Or, is God for us?

“Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” – Luke 23:39

“‘Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ [Jesus] replied, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.’” – Luke 23:42-43

3) To The Tomb

God’s actions confound and confuse. They disrupt our reality. Yet, we go about as if nothing has changed when in fact everything has changed. As St. Paul says, “everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new.”

“The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, ‘Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.’” – Luke 24:5-6

4) At The Table

Living? But how? Jesus does not raise himself. A power beyond Jesus is at work. There on the Emmaus Road hearts burn, eyes see but do not know this stranger.

“When he was at table with them he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.” – Luke 24:30-31

But who opened their eyes? Who kept them closed as the Messiah’s story was told? The Greek text gives us a clue. Luke has employed what is known as the Divine Passive.

“That God is behind the scenes is self-evidently part of the worldview of NT writers. The nature of this book demands that we see him even when he is not mentioned.”
Daniel B. Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics

5) His Glorious Ascension

The language is that of poetry. Its ancient conceptions seem strange to us. Can the heavens really be torn open? Luke tells us that Jesus was taken up, carried up to heaven and disappeared in a cloud. As with the women at the tomb, there is confusion in the minds of the disciples.

“Men of Galilee! Why do you stand looking into heaven?” – Acts 1:11

“The ‘withdrawal’ of Jesus is not so much an absence as it is a presence in a new and more powerful mode. “ – Luke Timothy Johnson, Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Luke

6) Wait

Waiting, praying, watching.

“I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” – Luke 24:49

Teilhard de Chardin says we should “trust in the slow work of God.” But it can be ever so slow, taxing our patience. We want to get on with it. He also says that “it is the law of progress that it is made by passing through some stages of instability.”

7) Empowered To Serve

Another house. Another room. But bigger. Fifty days ago all we needed was space for slightly more than a dozen. Now, we are about 120, constantly in prayer.

The story says there was wind, and something like tongues of fire. People were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in languages not their own. The diaspora heard the wonders of God.

“They were all bewildered and could make nothing of it, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” – Acts 2:12

Indeed, what is the meaning of Pentecost, of the Cross, the Footwashing and the Empty Tomb? These questions linger and await answers, not given by the scholars of this or any age, but by you.

ΑΩ

“The Word of God must never be a soothing narcotic. The Living Word and our encounter with it should be a pro-vocative experience in the sense that here God calls us forth imperiously out of our comfort zone and offers us new life on his own conditions.” Erasmio Leiva-Merikakis, Fire of Mercy: Heart of the Word, vol. 3