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Uniting Word & World

For Sunday, May 17, 2015

Handling Snakes

## This Sunday's Scripture Readings

The Ascension of the Lord

<http://new.usccb.org/bible/readings/051715-ascension.cfm>

Acts 1:1-11

Ephesians 1:17-23 or 4:1-13

Mark 16:15-20



Walking through some grass during a warm spring morning, I stepped on something squishy. My immediate thought was that it was a snake. Waves of revulsion washed over me as I jumped away. Thankfully, it turned out to be only an old discarded length of garden hose. However, it still took a few minutes for my heart to stop racing and my pulse to return to normal.

[Fear of snakes](#) is part of our evolutionary heritage, built up in our collective consciousness through many ill-fated encounters with these slimy, poisonous reptiles over the centuries. It is also part of our Judeo-Christian heritage as a symbol of evil and the cunning of the devil from humanity's first encounter with the snake in the Garden of Eden.

That brings us to the readings for the feast of the Ascension. The Gospel is one of those bizarre passages of Scripture that we are tempted to overlook. Picking up serpents has never made it onto any job description or mission statement for Christian ministry.

However, when we consider our natural revulsion of these reptiles and how they represent our ancient foe, the meaning of Jesus' words come to light.

As Jesus ascends to heaven, he leaves us to continue his struggle against sin and death. He penetrates the heavens to claim the victory he has already won through his death and

resurrection. On earth, we are claiming that victory by grappling with the forces that once intimidated and defeated us here below. Handling snakes and drinking poison serve as symbols of sin and death that no longer have power over us. Our instinct will always be to recoil in horror at their sight. However, our fear of being bitten cannot keep us from bringing the good news to the darkest places of our world. In faith, we know that the victory has already been won. So we can go forward in confidence even in the face of great evil and massive opposition because of the “hope that belongs to his call” (Eph 1:18).

Jesus says something else curious: “proclaim the gospel to every creature” (Mk 16:15). While [Saint Francis of Assisi](#) took this command literally, we can understand it as a reminder that all of creation will share in Christ’s victory over sin and death. There will be a new heaven and a new earth ([Rev 21:1](#)). The Pope’s [upcoming encyclical](#) on the environment will remind us that our struggle against evil also requires that we care for this planet, which is the stage on which the drama of salvation unfolds. Along with us, all of creation will be redeemed in Christ ... even snakes.

Douglas Sousa, STL

## PRAYER

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Saint Michael the Archangel,  
defend us in battle;  
be our protection  
against the wickedness and snares of the devil.  
May God rebuke him, we humbly pray;  
and do thou, O prince of the heavenly host,  
granted by the divine power of God,  
cast into hell Satan and all the evil spirits  
who wander through the world  
seeking the ruin of souls.  
Amen.

## NOTICES

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### CRS RESPONDS TO EARTHQUAKE IN NEPAL

As the official overseas relief and development agency of the USCCB and a member of Caritas International and the National Catholic Development Conference, CRS is leading relief efforts for victims of the recent earthquake in Nepal. To donate to CRS’ efforts, click [here](#). LPi has also created a bulletin cover to promote these efforts. LPi customers can find the cover by searching Art & Media Portal for keyword “Nepal”; the cover is also available to other parishes via [www.4LPi.com](#).

### VISIT TO A CEMETERY—MEMORIAL DAY

Many parishes will commemorate those who died in the armed forces on Monday, May 25. You may want to offer prayer cards or flyers to parish members to use on their own on that day. The LPi Art & Media Portal offers prayers and clip art that can be easily used to design a prayer card for Memorial Day. Use your parish’s LPi Art & Media Portal account, or register for a free sample account at [www.Portal.4LPi.com](#), using promo code **Memorial**.

### CATHOLIC COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGN

The annual Catholic Communication Campaign Collection will be taken up in many dioceses on the weekend of May 17. Collection resources are available from the USCCB website at: <http://usccb.org/catholic-giving/opportunities-for-giving/catholic-communication-campaign/collection/>, as well as on LPi's Art & Media Portal (keyword "CCC"). This national collection supports the dissemination of great Catholic content in a variety of media formats.

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