

Ascension to Pentecost 4



“The ascension of Christ tilts the universe for us; it gives us a fresh perspective and meaning for the world.”

Richard Bartlett (USPG)

Prayer

Ascended Christ,
you rule over all:
may we live and love
in the light of your reign.
Amen

The Father gives the Son “authority over all”

John 17.2

High above Rio de Janeiro stands this famous statue. It is a wonderful symbol for the Ascension. Christ’s outstretched arms certainly speak of crucifixion but they speak too of both compassion and authority. It seems as if they are long enough, open enough, to encompass the whole of the sprawling city below. From his vantage point, Christ-over-Rio can, as it were, see into every one of those glittering homes, shielding but also challenging those who live within: the vantage point means that *he* is also visible to *them*, a commanding presence they know is there even if they don’t look up.

Rio’s Christ is no walk-over. Serene but imposing, he is the one to whom ‘all authority in heaven and on earth has been given’ (Mt 28.18). No wonder there were ructions within the Roman world as the early Church started exploring what this meant. No wonder that the Ascension has been called the most *political* of Christian doctrines.

What do we see as we gaze at this statue in the context of coronavirus?

Our Ascension hymns are full of crowns and thrones and sceptres but in this photo, we see that Rio’s ‘king’ has been cleverly illuminated so that he wears blue scrubs under the white coat of a doctor, a stethoscope round his neck. Though the one who ‘took the form of a slave’ is now ‘highly exalted’ (Phil 2.7 and 9), he is still a servant-king, tenderly caring for the sick and dying and walking in solidarity beside the world’s key workers. The affirmation of the Ascension is that the crucified and risen Christ is in control even when it feels as if everything is *out* of control.

To acknowledge that Christ is King has huge implications for the way we live. We see things from a different perspective... What might happen if we accepted the challenge to find ‘higher ground’ with Christ this Ascensiontide? Our understanding of ourselves, our communities, our global home would undoubtedly be broadened. What fresh insights about our current situation might we gain?