

Their eyes are straining to see him who had been so long in their midst, and who had finally disappeared from view. How often they had been with him. They had watched him, listened to him.

Yes, they had been the eyes and ears witnessing his work and his message. No one had witnessed as much as they had. Even after his death they had met him, they had been together with him, they had eaten with him. And was it now to come to an end?

The artist has obviously empathised with them and the way their gaze still followed him. Each individual is depicted in this way. Not only their heads, also their hearts, their whole bodies, are directed towards the Lord.

Their hands – some of them have even reached out their arms towards him. Some seem to spread their hands like a priest at prayer, others point upwards towards him who had just been with them.

Mary stands among them in a wonderful blue garment covering a yellow dress, and with a white veil and a crown on her head. She, too, reaches upwards. She looks after him longingly, to whom she had been a mother, and for whom she had lived since the hour of the Annunciation until his hour under the cross.

There Jesus had given her a task: *“Woman, this is your son!”* (Jn 19,26) as he looked at the disciple he loved. He had also shown this disciple: *“This is your mother!”* (Jn 19,27). The first disciples took her into their midst. Luke mentions them by name, and he also mentions Mary. This moved the artist of the Cathedral at Le Mans to place her among them. So the time of the apostles begins in the Room of the Last Supper: The apostles gathered in prayer with Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

Dr Peter Wolf

Start of the time of the apostles

A picture meditation

Reading from the Acts of the Apostles:

While at table with them, he had told them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for what the Father had promised. 'It is', he had said, 'what you have heard me speak about: John baptised with water but, not many days from now, you are going to be baptised with the Holy Spirit.' Now having met together, they asked him, 'Lord, has the time come for you to restore the kingdom to Israel?' He replied, 'It is not for you to know times or dates that the Father has decided by his own authority, but you will receive the power of the Holy Spirit which will come on you, and then you will be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judaea and Samaria, and indeed to earth's remotest end.' As he said this he was lifted up while they looked on, and a cloud took him from their sight. They were still staring into the sky as he went, when suddenly two men in white were standing beside them, and they said, 'Why are you Galileans standing here looking into the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will come back in the

same way as you have seen him go to heaven.' So from the Mount of Olives, as it is called, they went back to Jerusalem, a short distance away, no more than a Sabbath walk; and when they reached the city they went to the upper room where they were staying; there were Peter and John, James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Jude son of James. With one heart all these joined constantly in prayer, together with some women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. (Acts 1, 4-14)

Introduction to picture meditation

I discovered a stained glass window in the Cathedral of Le Mans, France, dating from 1120, that illustrates these verses from the start of Acts. It is one of the earliest stained glass windows in Christendom.

The picture records the situation at the Ascension of Jesus passed down to us by Luke in Acts. Shortly before this they had still eaten together. The Lord had told them not to leave Jerusalem but to remain together until they had been baptized by the Holy Spirit.

This awakened in them the hope that the time had now come when Jesus would again set up the Kingdom of Israel. The Risen Lord immediately denied this. They were hoping that they would be given seats to the right and left of the Messiah in this kingdom.

Jesus has quite another task for them: *"You will be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judaea and Samaria, and indeed to earth's remotest end."* (Acts 1,4)

Our stained glass window depicts the next lines in Acts: *"As he said this he was lifted up while they looked on, and a cloud took him from their sight. They were still staring into the sky as he went..."* (Acts 1, 9-10)

Jesus had already been lifted up and a cloud had hidden him from them. Above the apostles the blue sky is encompassed by two red panes with large jewels that indicate the glory of heaven into which Jesus had ascended. The Lord can no longer be seen. He has been taken from them. The "time of the apostles" had begun.

They stand there and stare unwaveringly up to heaven. A colourful group of twelve men with Mary in their midst. Notice how the artist has shown them in the picture with their heads turned so that their faces look upwards.