

Anthroposophical Society in New Hampshire
Ascension and Whitsun Newsletter
2021



Fra Angelico The Corsini Triptych

This year the Soul Calendar verses that go with the weeks of Ascension and Whitsun are as follows:

For Ascension (Thursday, May 13th)

Verse 6

There has arisen from its separate state
My Self, and finds itself
As revelation of the worlds
In powers of Time and Space.
The world shows everywhere to me,
As archetype divine,
The truth of my own likeness

For Whitsun (Sunday, May 23rd)

Verse 8

The senses' might now grows
In union with the Gods' creating;
It presses power of thinking
Down to the dimness of a dream.
When god-like Being
Would with my soul unite,
Then human thinking
Must humbly bide in dream existence.

From: The Rhythm of the Christian Year: Renewing the Religious Cycle of Festivals
by Emil Bock, Chapter *Christ, the Lord of the Elements*

Forty days after Easter, a world-transforming event illuminates the souls of the disciples. They had been together in a house for forty days. The room on Mount Zion in Jerusalem had been their refuge. It made it possible for them to be in a condition of inwardness, of collecting their thoughts. Thus they could have at their table the guest whose presence was for them a might riddle and at the same time a reason for such great exultation, the constant source of Providential recognition. Acts does relate that the Resurrected One was in their midst for forty days and taught them about the mysteries of the kingdom of God. The destiny brought it about at one time that they were privileged to experience the presence of this guest anew outside in nature on the summit of the Mount of Olives, not at the table in the Cenacle but at the flower-decorated table of nature's spring. The way the figure of the Resurrected One manifested to them was strangely different and quite new. It was in the process of rising and rose before their souls in increasing prominence of light. The Resurrected One in the sphere of the elements—something unheard-of! The world all around, air and atmosphere filled with plant-growth and the scent of blossoms, the pressing of new life, it all harmonized strangely with the light and warmth that emanated from his figure. What sort of disconcerting new secret was this: Christ, the Lord of the elements?

But barely had the disciples perceived him with their visionary souls when it was this very realm of the elements, the atmosphere of earth's air, that took him away before their eyes. Only now, he had truly disappeared from them. And the gift of Providence, which had taken place in the inner composed space of the Cenacle for forty days, was not repeated. He had passed over into a different state of existence. Only for one moment, when he entered the great transformation, it had been possible to experience him. Deep, grave sadness was the substance of the ten days that followed until, at the hour of sunrise on Whitsun morning, a first groping answer touched their questioning souls. Once, again, they were in the room of the forty days. And all of a sudden, a powerful conviction grew in their minds which told them: he is not far from us; that moment on Ascension Day did not remove him from us—no, he is even closer to us now than he was before. They felt him within themselves; the fiery flame of Christ's indwelling arose in their hearts from a glimmering spark. They experienced how they themselves were carried along into the process of growth, a process that, ten days earlier, had taken him away from their sight. This not only gave them consolation but motivation and strength. It led them out into the world and turned them into apostles.

Still, we must ask whether the disciples did receive a full answer through the Whitsun event to the question which the Providential and then unrelentingly extinguishing moment of Ascension had aroused in them. The riddle remained open. When would their experience on the Mount of Olives continue: the Resurrected One, received like a kind in his glory by creation in the realm of the elements?

Around Ascension, we are surrounded by the profusion of flowers in springtime. Everything blossoms more lavishly and splendidly than at other times. The secret of the blossom belongs together most intimately with the secret of Ascension. For what causes plants and trees to bloom? How does this miracle come about, in the face of which we are not astounded over and over again

simply because we have long since become much too accustomed to it? The spring-sun entices the earth's soul to rise up, and so she soars up from the earth's depths to which she had withdrawn during winter. Then, earth is covered all around with the green abundance of new life. But at this point it is still earth that is revealed when the meadows sprout and the green foliage bursts from the branches. Earth demonstrates that she has decided to let her soul ascend. And then, all at once, appear white, red and all the colorful shades of the flowers. This is no longer earth alone. She could not bring this forth, if the soaring and ascending of her soul would not reached up to where an answer from heaven, filled with being, comes to meet her. The greening is still from earth, the blossoms are already from heaven. The blossoming all around us indicates the earth's very soul is in a state of ascension, of a rising up which has already led to a touching with heaven. In bridal surrender, earth has been able wed heaven.

In the flowering, an ascension of the earth's soul reaches its goal. Heaven, to which she aspires, is not a pale beyond. It is the supersensory sphere that supports and penetrates all of our earth's existence, yet it is only near where upward-surging forces prevail that break the spell of this material world. Every spring, earth produces such upward-rising forces. Does the whole of nature not indicate this in a thousand wondrous allegories? A tree is really nothing but a question as long as it is leafless. But when it is adorned with green foliage, does it not replicate earth with its crown, as if its trunk were only the means through which earth offers up a likeness of herself to heaven? Earth makes manifest her will to surge upward, to ascend. And when the same crowns, first on the cherry trees, and then on pear and apple trees, are covered with blossoms, it is as if heaven, to which earth rises up a thousand-fold, would say: you, earth, you can be a heaven. And all at once, the replicas of earth in the crowns of trees turn into a far-spread, gladdening field of replicas of heaven on earth. And when the blossoms begin only too soon to fall to the ground, is our fearful shiver, evoked as it is by the quick transience, justified? For it was only just a moment that allowed us to perceive heaven's radiance. A faint shadow of the loss, which the disciples suffered so quickly after the light of Ascension had shone forth, has come over us. And when the blossoming splendor has disappeared ten days after Ascension, does the subsequent festival bring the comforting solution that was offered so long ago by Whitsun morning? Even as the briefly blossoming secret of Ascension matured to the flames of Pentecost in the hearts of the disciples, the colorful blossoming in nature is followed by the Pentecostal flame-like ripening of the pistils. Millions of invisible Whitsun-flames, which arouse in us a presentiment of future gifts from heaven, replace the visible lustre of colors. Just as the blossoms were not from the earth but from heaven, so too, afterwards, the fruits on the trees are gifts from heaven to the earth, after-effects, issues of the celestial journey undertaken by the earth's soul. In the same way, even if the apostles could not fully comprehend this as yet, Whitsun was a result of the mighty transformation they had become cognizant of in the being of Christ on the Mount of Olives. The fruiting began which proceeded from the flowering. Surrounded by the flame of ripening, human souls themselves were the pistils.

From: The Festivals and Their Meanings: Ascension and Pentecost; The Whitsun Mystery and its Connection with the Ascension, lecture by Rudolf Steiner, May 7, 1923

.....Let us therefore picture once more the Ascension scene: the disciples have a clairvoyant vision of the sun-ward streaming flow of human etheric bodies. But they also perceive how Christ unites

Himself with this urge, retracts it, hold it fast. The mighty scene of the Ascension is that of the *rescue of the physical-etheric nature of man by Christ*.

The disciples withdraw in deep contemplation. For in their awakened souls is the knowledge that through the Mystery of Golgotha the physical-etheric nature of mankind as a whole has been preserved. But what happens, they wonder, to the spirit and soul? Where do human beings acquire the power to receive the Christ Impulse into their spirit and soul, into their ego and astral body? The answer is found in the Whitsun festival.

Through the Mystery of Golgotha the Christ Impulse has taken effect on the earth as a reality which can only be perceived and grasped by *spiritual* cognition. No materialistic knowledge, no materialistic science can understand the Mystery of Golgotha. Hence the soul must acquire the power of spiritual cognition, spiritual perception, spiritual feeling, in order to be able to understand how, on Golgotha, the Christ Impulse was united with the impulses of the earth.

Christ Jesus fulfilled the Deed of Golgotha for this purpose, fulfilled it in such a way that ten days after the event of the Ascension He sent man the possibility of imbuing also his inner soul-spiritual nature, his ego and astral body, with the Christ Impulse. The permeation of the human spirit and soul with the power to understand the Mystery of Golgotha, the sending of the Holy Spirit, is the picture of the Whitsun festival, of Pentecost. Christ fulfilled His deed for all mankind. But to each human individual who understands this deed, Christ sent the spirit, enabling spirit and soul of each individual to have access to what was accomplished for all mankind. Through the spirit we must learn to experience the Christ Mystery inwardly, in our spirit and soul.

Thus these two pictures stand side by side in the history of the evolution of humanity. The Ascension picture tells us that the Deed of Golgotha was fulfilled for the physical body and the etheric body in the *universal human* sense. Whitsun tells us that each single human being must make this Deed bear fruit in himself by receiving the Holy Spirit. Thereby the Christ Impulse becomes *individual* in each human being.

.....Whitsun is also pre-eminently a festival of flowers. Whoever has a true feeling for this festival will go out among the buds and blossoms opening under the influence of the sun, under the etheric and astral influences, and will perceive in the flower-decked earth the earthly image of what streams together in the two pictures of Christ's Ascension and the descent of the tongues of fire upon the heads of the disciples. The heart of man as it opens may also be symbolized by the flower opening itself to the sun; and what pours down from the sun, giving the flower the fertilizing power it needs, may be symbolized by the tongues of fire descending upon the heads of the disciples. Anthroposophy can work upon human hearts with the power that streams from an understanding of the festival times and from true contemplation of each festival season; it can help to evoke the soul-mood that truly belongs with these spring festival days.

