



FAITH CIRCLES

WEEKLY SMALL
GROUP CATECHESIS

ASCENSION SUNDAY • YEAR A



SUNDAY GOSPEL

Go Make Disciples

Matthew 28:16-20

The eleven disciples set out for Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had arranged to meet them. When they saw him they fell down before him, though some hesitated.

Jesus came up and spoke to them. He said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.' ■

GOSPEL REFLECTION

by Trish McCarthy

As disciples we are called to evangelise. It is part of the cycle of maturity and of life. Historically, as the disciples grew in maturity, more was expected of them. It wasn't enough to ponder the gift amongst themselves. The presence of the Holy Spirit had to be made known and this was primarily done through personal testimony, witness to the Word and living communities.

We too are invited to share what God has done in our life. To testify to the changes we have experienced with the help of the Holy Spirit. There is always a risk involved though when we 'go out'; we become vulnerable, capable of being wounded- misunderstood, rejected, the agony of calumny or loss of relationship. However Jesus promises we are not alone when we act under the guidance of the Spirit. He too experienced these things when He testified to the Father's love. As mature disciples we are invited to mould our life to the pattern of the Paschal Mystery in order to live the victory over sin- those things which keep us separated from God. My prayer for you this day is that the Spirit will reveal to you one instance of transformation that has taken place within you giving confidence as you share this joy with another. ■

A WORD FROM POPE FRANCIS

Today we celebrate the Ascension of Jesus into Heaven, 40 days after Easter. The Acts of the Apostles recounts this episode, the final separation of the Lord Jesus from his disciples and from this world. The Gospel of Matthew, however, reports Jesus' mandate to his disciples: the invitation to go out, to set out in order to proclaim to all nations his message of salvation. "To go" or, better, "depart" becomes the key word of today's feast: Jesus *departs* to the Father and commands his disciples to *depart* for the world.

Jesus *departs*, he ascends to Heaven, that is, he returns to the Father from whom he had been sent to the world. He finished his work, thus, he returns to the Father. But this does not mean a separation, for he remains forever with us, in a new way. By his ascension, the Risen Lord draws the gaze of the Apostles — and our gaze — to the heights of Heaven to show us that the end of our journey is the Father. He himself said that he would go to prepare a place for us in Heaven. Yet, Jesus remains present and active in the affairs of human history through the power and the gifts of his Spirit;

he is beside each of us: even if we do not see him with our eyes, He is there! He accompanies us, he guides us, he takes us by the hand and he lifts us up when we fall down. The risen Jesus is close to persecuted and discriminated Christians; he is close to every man and woman who suffers. He is close to us all; he is here, too, with us in the square; the Lord is with us! Do you believe this? Then let's say it together: the Lord is with us!

When Jesus returns to Heaven, he brings the Father a gift. What is the gift? His wounds. His body is very beautiful, no bruises, no cuts from the scourging, but he retains his wounds. When he returns to the Father he shows him the wounds and says: "behold Father, this is the price of the pardon you have granted". When the Father beholds the wounds of Jesus he forgives us forever, not because we are good, but because Jesus paid for us. Beholding the wounds of Jesus, the Father becomes most merciful. This is the great work of Jesus today in Heaven: showing the Father the price of forgiveness, his wounds. This is the beauty that urges us not to be afraid

to ask forgiveness; the Father always pardons, because he sees the wounds of Jesus, he sees our sin and he forgives it.

But Jesus is present also through the Church, which He sent to extend his mission. Jesus' last message to his disciples is the mandate *to depart*: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations". It is a clear mandate, not just an option! The Christian community is a community "going forth", "in departure". More so: the Church was born "going forth". And you will say to me: what about cloistered communities? Yes, these too, for they are always "going forth" through prayer, with the heart open to the world, to the horizons of God. And the elderly, the sick? They, too, through prayer and union with the wounds of Jesus.

To his missionary disciples Jesus says: "I am with you always, to the close of the age". Alone, without Jesus, we can do nothing! In Apostolic work our own strengths, our resources, our structures do not suffice, even if they are necessary. Without the presence of the Lord and the power of his Spirit our work, though it may be well organized, winds up being ineffective. And thus, we go to tell the nations who Jesus is. ■

TALKING POINTS

1. What have been some joyful events or relationships in your life that you have shared with others? What was it like to do this and how did people respond?
2. Both our gospel reflections today point to Jesus' command to 'go' and 'make disciples' sharing our joy of being in relationship with Jesus. In what ways do you already share your faith and joy with others?
3. As Pope Francis points out, no matter our skills we need the power of the Holy Spirit to guide and lead us in sharing faith. How have you experienced the power of prayer and closeness of Jesus as a means of assisting you in your life?

PRAYER POINTS

Pray for each other: Ask about and pray for the needs of the group members. Individuals might pray for themselves or ask someone else to pray for them.

Reflect: Spend some time asking Jesus, through his Holy Spirit to reveal to you one instance of transformation that has taken place within you giving confidence as you share this joy with another.

Response: *Jesus, be with us as we share our faith and joy with others.*

Closing Prayer: Jesus, you promised to be with us always as we continue your mission. Send us your Holy Spirit to be our teacher, guide and comforter as we share the joy, peace and love of our faith with others. Amen.

