

**GOSPEL**

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.'

**A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS**

Today we celebrate Jesus' Ascension into heaven, which took place 40 days after Easter. The Gospel passage, which concludes the Gospel of Matthew, presents the moment of the Risen One's final farewell to his disciples. The scene is set in Galilee, the place where Jesus had called them to follow him and to form the first nucleus of his new community. Now those disciples have traversed the "fire" of the Passion and of the Resurrection; at the visit of the Risen Lord they prostrate themselves before him, although some remain doubtful. Jesus gives this frightened community the immense task of evangelizing the world; and he reinforces this responsibility with the command to teach and baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus' Ascension into heaven thus constitutes the end of the mission that the Son received from the Father and the beginning of the continuation of this mission on the part of the Church. From this moment, from the moment of the Ascension, in fact, Christ's presence in the world is mediated by his disciples, by those who believe in him and proclaim him. This mission will last until the end of history and every day will have the assistance of the Risen Lord, who assures: "I am with you always, to the close of the age".

His presence brings strength during persecution, comfort in tribulations, support in the difficult situations that the mission and the proclamation of the Gospel will encounter. The Ascension reminds us of Jesus' assistance and of his Spirit that gives confidence, gives certainty to our Christian witness in the world. He reveals to us the reason for the Church's existence: the Church exists to proclaim the Gospel, for this alone! So too, the joy of the Church is proclaiming the Gospel. The Church is all of us baptized people. Today we are called to better understand that God has given us the great dignity and responsibility of proclaiming him to the world, of making him accessible to all mankind. This is our dignity; this is the greatest honour of each one of us, of all the baptized!

On this Feast of the Ascension, as we turn our gaze toward heaven, where Christ has ascended and sits at the right hand of the Father, we strengthen our steps on earth so as to continue our journey — our mission of witnessing to and living the Gospel in every environment — with enthusiasm and courage. However, we are well aware that this does not depend first and foremost on our strengths, on our organizational abilities or human resources. Only with the light and strength of the Holy Spirit can we effectively fulfil our mission of leading others to know and increasingly experience Jesus' tenderness.

Let us ask the Virgin Mary to help us contemplate the heavenly benefits that the Lord promises us, and to become ever more credible witnesses to his Resurrection, to the true Life.

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

- What does it mean to you to "make disciples of all the nations"?
- Do you feel comfortable talking to others about Jesus? Why/Why not?
- Discuss: Why/why not is it important to share the Good News (Salvation through Jesus) with other people?

**PRAYER**

*Spend some time in prayer with one another*

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.