

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 commandments I gave to you. And know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.'

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS*24 May 2020*

Today, in Italy and in other countries, the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord is being celebrated. The Gospel reading (cf. Mt 28:16-20) shows us the Apostles who gather in Galilee, at "the mountain to which Jesus had directed them" (v. 16). The Lord's final encounter with his followers takes place here, on the mountain. The "mountain" has a strong symbolic and evocative charge. Jesus proclaimed the Beatitudes on the Mount (cf. Mt 5:1-12); He withdrew to the mountains to pray (cf. Mt 14:23). He welcomed the crowds there and healed the sick (cf. Mt 15:29). However this time on the mountain, he is no longer the Master who acts and teaches, but rather the Risen One who asks the disciples to take action and to proclaim, entrusting to them the mandate to continue his work.

He assigns to them the mission to all the peoples. He says: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (vv. 19-20). The contents of the mission entrusted to the Apostles are the following: to proclaim, baptize, teach and walk the path traced by the Master, that is, the living Gospel. This message of salvation first of all implies the duty of witness — one cannot proclaim without witness — to which we too, today's disciples, are called to explain our faith. Faced with such a demanding task, and thinking of our weaknesses, we feel inadequate, as the Apostles themselves surely felt. But we must not be discouraged, remembering the

words Jesus addressed to them before ascending to Heaven: "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (v. 20).

This promise ensures the constant and consoling presence of Jesus among us. But how is this presence realised? Through His Spirit, who leads the Church to walk through history as the companion of every person. That Spirit sent by Christ and the Father, who works the remission of sins and sanctifies all those who are repentant and open themselves with confidence to his gift. With the promise to remain with us until the end of time, Jesus inaugurates the style of his presence in the world as the Risen One. Jesus is present in the world but with another style, the style of the Risen One, that is a presence that is revealed in the Word, in the Sacraments and in the constant and interior action of the Holy Spirit. The Feast of the Ascension tells us that although Jesus ascended to Heaven to dwell gloriously at the right hand of the Father, he is still and always among us: this is the source of our strength, our perseverance and our joy, from the very presence of Jesus among us with the strength of the Holy Spirit.

May the Virgin Mary accompany our journey with her maternal protection. May we learn from her the gentleness and courage to be witnesses in the world of the Risen Lord.

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REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



Head: Jesus sends the disciples to make disciples of all nations and promises to remain with them; what does this reveal about the nature of the Church's mission and how it is sustained?



Heart: The disciples worship, yet some still hesitate; where do you recognise both faith and hesitation in your own response to Jesus' call?



Hands: Jesus sends his disciples not only to witness by example but to teach and proclaim; where might you need to be more explicit in speaking about your faith this week?

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. Offer 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 praying the 'Glory Be'.