

GOSPEL

Mark 16:15-20

Jesus showed himself to the Eleven and said to them, 'Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation. He who believes and is baptised is saved; he who does not believe will be condemned. These are the signs that will be associated with believers: in my name they will cast out devils; they will have the gift of tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands, and be unharmed should they drink deadly poison; they will lay their hands on the sick, who will recover.'

And so the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven: there at the right hand of God he took his place, while they, going out, preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word by the signs that accompanied it.

HOMILY OF ST JOHN PAUL II (EXCERPT)

12 May 1991, translated from Italian

1. "I came from the Father and came into the world; Now I leave the world again and go to the Father" (John 16:28).

They are words pronounced by Christ the day before his passion and death on the Cross when, in the Cenacle, he took leave of the Apostles. "He showed himself to them alive, after his passion, with many trials, *appearing to them for forty days* and speaking to them about the Kingdom of God" (Acts 1, 3). Today the Church solemnly celebrates the memory of the Fortieth day, made current in this Liturgy of the Ascension, as the Responsorial Psalm invited us to proclaim: "God ascends amid acclamations" (Ps 47, 6).

The return of Christ to the Father is described concisely by the sacred authors. "The Lord Jesus - says Saint Mark - was taken up into heaven and sat at the right hand of God" (Mk 16, 19). In *the Acts of the Apostles*, the evangelist Saint Luke writes: "He was lifted up before their (the disciples') eyes and a cloud took him away from their sight" (Acts 1, 9). In the Old Testament, the cloud was a sign of the presence of God (cf. Ex 13, 21-22; 40, 34-35), given that Jesus Christ, leaving the visible world, is enveloped by this divine presence. Once his visible existence on earth has ended, *the Only Begotten Son made man lives in*

the bosom of the Trinity with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Saint Paul, in *his Letter to the Ephesians*, in turn, comments on the mystery of the Ascension in this way: "But what does the word 'ascended' mean, if not that he had first descended here on earth? He who *descended* is the same who also ascended above all the heavens, *to fill all things*" (Eph 4, 9-10). Thus the words of the Lord were fulfilled: "I came from the Father and came into the world; now I leave the world again, and go to the Father."

2. In the Ascension, Jesus Christ "ascends" to fill all things: the whole world, all creatures, the history of man.

In this perspective, the last mandate given by Jesus to the Apostles before returning to the Father is explained: "*Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature*" (Mk 16, 15). This is what the Evangelist Saint Mark writes, while in the *Acts of the Apostles*, Saint Luke reports: "We are witnesses of all the things he accomplished in the region of the Jews and in Jerusalem" (Acts 10, 38).

Preaching the Gospel means bearing witness to Christ: to Him who "went about benefiting and healing" everyone (cf. Acts 10, 38), to Him who was crucified for the sins of the world, to Him who is risen and lives forever.

The preaching of the Gospel, that is, bearing witness to Christ, *is the duty of all those baptised in the Holy Spirit*. Before his departure, the Lord Jesus explicitly underlines this fact, in ordering the Apostles to wait for the fulfillment of the Father's promise: "John baptised with water, but you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit, not many days from now. You will have strength from the Holy Spirit who will come upon you and you will be my witnesses" (Acts 1, 5-8).

The Church, only with the power of the Holy Spirit, can bear witness to Christ. Only thanks to her power can she effectively preach the Gospel to all creatures.

The Ascension of the Lord is intimately linked to Pentecost, and every year the Church dedicates the days between one and the other to the Novena of the

continued over page ►

Holy Spirit, which began in the Cenacle in Jerusalem. The first to make this Novena were the *Apostles themselves gathered with the Mother of the Lord*.

3. Jesus Christ ascended into the highest heaven *to fill all things*. This fullness of the created world is accomplished thanks to the power of the Holy Spirit. This work takes place in the earthly history of men and nations: the Holy Spirit shapes, in an invisible but real way, what the Apostle Saint Paul calls the Body of Christ, speaking of it in the following terms: "*One body, one spirit* , just as there is only one hope to which you have been called, that of your vocation; one Lord, one faith, one baptism. One God, Father of all, who is above all, acts through all and is present in all" (*Eph 4:4-6*).

In this way the *Ascension* of the Lord *is not a simple farewell*. First of all it is the beginning of a new presence and a new saving action: "My Father always works and I also work" (*Jn 5, 17*). This working *with the strength of the Holy Spirit*, who descended on Pentecost, of the Paraclete Spirit, *gives divine strength to the earthly life of humanity in the visible Church*. With the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ glorified at the right hand of the Father, the Lord of the Church, establishes "some as apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, others as pastors and teachers, to qualify the brothers to carry out the ministry, to order to *build up the Body of Christ*" (*Eph 4, 11-12*).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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



Head: St John Paul II describes "preaching" as giving "witness to Christ" and all he has done for us. What does it mean to you to "witness to Christ"?



Heart: What might stop us from sharing our faith with others?



Hands: Discuss in your Faith Circle some practical ways that you can invite friends, family members, work colleagues, or strangers to connect with your faith community.

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'.