

THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD; Cycle – A; May 17th
Acts 1: 1-11; Ephesians 1: 17-23; Matthew 28: 16-20

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

Leonardo da Vinci, the famous Italian painter, had started to work on a large canvas in his studio. For a while he worked at it – choosing the subject, planning the perspective, sketching the outline, with his own inimitable genius. Then suddenly he stopped working on it. Summoning one of his talented students, the master invited him to complete the work. The horrified student protested that he was both unworthy and unable to complete the great painting which his master had begun. But Da Vinci silenced him. "Will not what I have done so far inspire you to do your best to complete it?" Jesus our Master began to spread the Good News; he illustrated his message and he has left half way to his disciple to continue with it and to finish the rest of his work. The disciples took over the mission of Jesus and continued it. And this mission continues through the followers of Jesus even today.

When we celebrate the Feast of the Ascension of the Lord, what is important here is not how and when Jesus ascended to heaven, rather **the message given by him or the commissioning of the apostles for the great missionary task ahead.** The four gospels and the Acts of the Apostles speak about the final message of Jesus to the apostles, that they should bear witness to the gospel. Jesus asks them, **“Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” (Mt. 28:20).** As Matthew sees it, the apostles didn't have to remain on the mountain stiff necked as what to do next; for the mission was very clear and Jesus promised them the continued help through his assurance, **“And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”** Jesus fulfilled that promise by sending to them the Holy Spirit.

If we read the Acts of the Apostles which is the Church history of the first century, we come to know how seriously the apostles took this message. Peter preached boldly on the day of Pentecost and it is said that 3000 people received Christ and were baptized. The addition of Paul to the group boosted the missionary work among the gentiles. One thing we notice that both the apostles and the **faithful were equally** involved in preaching the gospel. According to the Acts of the Apostles chapter 8 the persecution scattered the Christians to different parts of Palestine and outside. But the persecution was a blessing in disguise. We read in the same chapter, **“Those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.”** Jesus always guided them through the Holy Spirit. But at times by his special intervention he assured them that indeed he was with

them. This assurance of the Lord gave courage to the apostles and the early Christians and also they believed that the Lord was with them in their work.

In the Encyclical “**Redemptoris Missio (Redeemer’s Mission)**” Pope St. John Paul II writes, “**Missionary activity is situated at the center of the Church’s life as a fundamental commitment of the whole people of God. At the same time the witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission.**” It is very clear from the words of the Holy Father that every Christian is an evangelizer. For centuries the laity which is the great power in the Church has been relaxing in the back seat leaving the missionary task to the ordained ministers and the religious. But they conveniently forget that the command of Jesus is meant for every Christian that he/she should go out and preach the gospel.

My dear friends, we all have a specific role to play in the field of evangelization; we are missionaries in different ways. You are sent into the world to do something unique for the Lord which others cannot do. Cardinal St. Newman the great visionary says, “**God has created me to do Him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission, I have part in a great work; I am a link in a chain, a bond between persons.**” We have wonderful opportunity before us every day to preach the gospel for which we don’t have to go out of our community or even from our own families. Perhaps, there are members in your own families who are away from the Lord and Church. You can start the work of evangelization there itself. Perhaps a little prayer, a word of encouragement, a kind gesture, one visit, one phone call and one card can make a big change in somebody’s life when it is done at the right moment.

We should not be shy to show the love of Jesus to others; we should not be afraid to give somebody the Word of God. When we sow the seed of the Word of God in somebody’s heart at the right moment, the Holy Spirit will start working. At the same time we should not be so much concerned about the result or fruit of our work. The fruit should come from the Holy Spirit. **On this occasion it is good to remember the evangelization message of Bishop Doerfler, “Be a friend of Jesus; make a friend and introduce Jesus to that friend.”**