

**THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD; Cycle – A; May 21<sup>st</sup> 2023**  
**Acts 1: 1-11; Ephesians 1: 17-23; Matthew 28: 16-20**

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

A beautiful old story tells that, after his Ascension into Heaven, Jesus was surrounded by the Holy Angels who began to question him about the continuation of his mission on earth. The angel Gabriel asked him, *“Do you trust in those 12 men who abandoned you at the critical moment, to take over the work you have left? Do you have any backup plan in case they fail?”* Jesus replied, “I don’t have any backup plan and those men will do their job.” Yes, Jesus trusted in them and they started their job right after the Ascension of Jesus.

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, **his 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 in the whole world. 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.”** And behold, **I am with you always, until the end of the age”** (Mt. 28:19-20). 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 Jesus assured them that indeed he was with them. For instance, Paul who faced a lot of oppositions from the Jews left them with disappointment and went to Corinth to the gentiles. The Acts of the Apostles says, **“One night in a vision the Lord said to Paul, “Do not be afraid. Go on speaking, and do not be silent, for I am with you. No one will attack and harm you, for I have many people in this city”** (Acts 8:9). 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 first three centuries the entire community was involved in missionary Apostolate. At that time the bishops were the head of communities and presbyters helped them in Eucharistic celebrations. As the communities multiplied, the bishops alone could not carry out the duties and soon the priests were ordained in the Church and they took over the Eucharistic celebrations and missionary work. Eventually the laity became inactive and passive except supporting the Church materially. But Vatican II re-discovered the role of laity in missionary work and emphasized that each Christian is a missionary. My dear friends, you too have equal role in the missionary work as the priests do. We all have a specific role to play in the field of evangelization; we are missionaries in different ways. We 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. After attending a Convention led by Billy Graham a woman wrote to him. **“Dear Sir, I feel that God is calling me to preach the gospel. But the trouble is that I have twelve children. What shall I do?”** The televangelist replied: *“Dear Madam, I am delighted to hear that God has called you to preach the Gospel. I am even more delighted to hear that He has provided you with a congregation.”*

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.”**