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Commentary on the Gospel: Go Out to the Whole World

Gospel for the feast of the Ascension (Cycle A), and commentary.

Gospel (*Mt 28:16-20*)

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them,

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”

Commentary

Saint Matthew's gospel concludes with the “missionary mandate.” Jesus sends forth the disciples to evangelize and baptize all peoples, since all men and women can now enjoy the fruits of the redemption. The first reading for today's solemnity adds that “when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight” (*Acts 1:9*).

The Risen Christ's mandate is addressed not only to the first disciples but to all of us. Saint

Josemaria reminds us: “We Christians are called upon to announce, in our own time, to this world to which we belong and in which we live, the message—old and at the same time new—of the Gospel.”[1]

And he insists that our Lord “wants the vast majority to stay right where they are, in all earthly occupations in which they work: the factory, the laboratory, the farm, the trades, the streets of the big cities and the trails of the mountains.”[2] Saint Josemaria urges us to take Christ’s missionary mandate personally: “‘Go, preach the gospel... I will be with you.’ Jesus has said this, and he has said it to you.”[3]

The feast of the Ascension is a good opportunity to renew our apostolic zeal, our desire to lead souls to heaven, where the glorified Jesus awaits us. We can learn from the

example of the first disciples, who undertook the difficult mission of evangelizing the whole pagan world, overcoming all types of obstacles. Far from being discouraged, the apostles were filled with trust in the risen and victorious Jesus, who told them clearly that “all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (v. 18), and that “I am with you always, to the close of the age” (v. 20).

As Pope Francis said: “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 honor of each one of us, of all the baptized!”[4]

The gospel tells us that when the Risen Christ showed Himself to the disciples “they worshiped him” (v. 17). Saint Thomas Aquinas says: “Those things which men wonder at they soon divulge, for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks (*Mt* 12:24).”[5] If we too adore our Lord with devotion and gratitude, if we show the Risen Lord the homage He deserves, our testimony before men will be more authentic and effective, since it will stem from a heart filled with God, like that of the apostles and the holy women.

[1] Saint Josemaria, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 132.

[2] *Ibid.*, no. 105.

[3] Saint Josemaria, *The Way*, no. 904.

[4] Pope Francis, *Regina caeli*, 28 May 2017.

[5] Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Catena aurea*, Gloss. in *Mk* 1:23-28.

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