

Commentary on the Gospel: The Ascension of the Lord

Gospel for the Solemnity of the Ascension (Cycle B), and commentary.

Gospel (*Mk 16:15-20*)

And he said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak

in new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.”

So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs.

Commentary

Forty days after the Resurrection, Jesus once again gathered his disciples around him. And as Saint Luke informs us, he led them towards Bethany, to the Mount of Olives.

At one point on their journey Jesus stops and gives them his final instructions: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation.” Then, as Jesus blesses them, he is taken up into heaven.

The disciples, filled with joy, returned to the Holy City and from there began to preach the good news throughout the whole world.

But how is it possible that these frightened men, without great talents, dared to undertake such a mission? How is it possible for them to return to Jerusalem filled with joy, if Jesus has just departed definitively from them?

The reasonable thing would have been for them to be confused and sad. The world is still the same, and Jesus has left them, after giving them an apparently impossible task. They were to be witnesses to God’s love for all men and women, witnesses to his

passion, death and resurrection. And they were to begin from Jerusalem, the city that had condemned him to death, the site of his failure. And now they had to go to the furthest corner of the world, a world so distant from God.

Nevertheless, we see them filled with joy. Why are they so happy to be Christ's disciples? Why is their mission not a burden?

Because Jesus is their intimate friend, because they know that he is accompanying them, that he is faithful to his promises. They don't place their trust in themselves, in their own abilities or strength. They have learned to trust him.

Our Lord's Ascension is not a "good-bye," or a "see you later." For Jesus had told them: "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (*Mt 28:20*). They know he is present in

their hearts, and above all in the Eucharist.

They are very aware of their limitations and weaknesses, their lack of talent and ability. But they know that Christ has risen, and that his Love is more powerful. They have learned that it is God who gives the growth. This is the source of their joy and enthusiasm.

It is a joy that makes them eager to bring his Love to the furthest corner of the world. Our Lord entrusted all mankind to the men and women who followed him. Their lives would be filled with suffering and challenges, but always accompanied by the joy of the Lord. Their faces reflected the Lord's glory: the glow on the face of a person in love.

Just as he sent out the disciples, Jesus also asks us to bring that true joy to a world that is still so in need of it. He wants us to be witnesses to what we

have seen and heard, to his wounds, to his Love.

He has chosen us and entrusted to us all men and women: our parents, siblings, relatives, friends, companions at work, all mankind. Apostolate is the natural result of the joy of being close to Jesus. As Saint Josemaria said: “Apostolate is love for God that overflows and communicates itself to others. The interior life implies a growth in union with Christ, in the bread and in the word. And apostolic zeal is the precise and necessary outward manifestation of interior life. When one tastes the love of God, one feels burdened with the weight of souls.”[1]

The souls around us need us. They need our joy, so that through it they may discover Jesus in their lives. In our daily activities, in our clean look, in our conversations filled with

understanding, in our eagerness to serve, understand, encourage and forgive others, the Risen Christ becomes present with his joy. This world of ours, not so different from the world of the men and women who first followed our Lord, needs Christians who bear on their faces the glow of God's love.

[1] “The Ascension of Our Lord,” in *Christ is Passing By*, no. 122.
