

HOMILY — ASCENSION 2020

Acts 1:1-11

Ps 47 **R.** *God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet.*

Eph 1:17-23

Mt 28:16-20

We celebrate today the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord, the feast of what St. Pope John Paul II called “the final act of our redemption” ([Homily](#), 24 May 1979), whereby Christ returned to the Father to prepare a place for us (Jn 14:1-3). You see, the Ascension of Jesus into heaven is really the culmination of the Incarnation. Jesus took up our flesh and our nature so that He might unite them to God. In the Ascension, Jesus brings that very nature and flesh into the presence of the Father for all eternity.

Now, as we heard in the first reading, in the days following the Resurrection, Jesus gave instructions and taught the Apostles about the Kingdom (cf. Acts 1:3-5). He helped the Apostles understand what had taken place over that first Holy Week, why He had to suffer and die, and what He had taught them.

Then, in His final moments on earth, Jesus commanded the Apostles to *be [His] witnesses ... to the ends of the earth* (Acts 1:8), and to *make disciples of all nations* (Mt 28:19). Having taught them Himself, Jesus gave the Apostles the charge to continue His mission, to preach the Good News and bring others into communion with Him. But this mission wasn’t just given to the Apostles! Through them, Jesus gives the mission to share the Gospel, to evangelise the world, to the whole Church. He instructs (commands!) all of His followers to continue His mission, and that includes you and me!

But, as St. Pope John Paul II wisely pointed out, “The instructions indicated, above all, that the Apostles were to wait for the Holy Spirit, who was the gift of the Father [cf. Acts 1:4]. From the beginning, it had to be crystal-clear that the source of the Apostles’ strength is the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who guides the Church in the way of truth; the Gospel is to spread through the power of God, and not by means of human wisdom or strength” (JP II, [Homily](#), 24 May 1979).

My brothers and sisters, our mission to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with the world is rooted not merely in our own encounter with Him and the joy that this relationship brings us, but more importantly, it’s rooted in the gift of the Holy Spirit, whom we received in Baptism and Confirmation.

It’s the Holy Spirit who gives us the zeal, the joy, the wisdom, the courage, the fidelity, and the words that we’ll need to fulfill this mission of evangelisation, this mission of proclaiming Christ to the world. “Like Jesus, [we, too, are] to speak explicitly about the Kingdom of God and about salvation. [We, too, are] to give witness to Christ to the ends of the earth. The early Church clearly understood these instructions and the missionary era began” (JP II, [Homily](#), 24 May 1979).

My brothers and sister, the world today is in need of a new missionary era! The world today hungers for the Word of God, for the love of God, for the grace of God... and it’s up to you and

to me — yes, to you and to me! — to bring it to them. We need to rediscover a missionary zeal! And I don't mean going abroad; we need to be missionaries right here, in our towns, in our families, in our homes. This is what the Church means when she speaks of a time for a 'new evangelisation'. We need to proclaim once again the Good News and salvation of Jesus Christ, each one of us! This is the mandate that Jesus gives us as He ascends to the Father.

But in order to do that, it means that we ourselves need to rediscover this beautiful gift. We ourselves first need to be renewed in the love and mercy of God and re-strengthened with His gift of the Holy Spirit. Because being an evangeliser isn't an 'optional' part of being a disciple of Christ! If we truly believe what we profess; if we truly believe what we say in the Creed; if we truly believe that Jesus is our Lord and God, that He saves us by His Body and Blood, then we have a moral and religious obligation to share that salvation with others, because God wants all to be saved (1 Tim 2:3-4; cf. 2 Pet 3:9). We believe because we believe it to be true. If it's the truth, then how could we ever keep it to ourselves?!

And so, with this command to preach the Gospel, Jesus shares His mission of saving the world with the Church, with each one of us who follow Him. We are indeed called to be missionary disciples: Jesus calls us to Himself so that He can send us out to gather others. That's why it's necessary for each one of us to know Jesus, to know Him personally — as a Person, not a mere idea —, and to always continue growing in our relationship with Him, learning more about Him and about what He's done for us. And there are basically three ways in which this knowledge of Jesus can be gained:

First, through prayer. We need to spend time with Jesus in order to get to know Him; we need to *be* with Him, to *speak* with Him, to *listen* to Him. A relationship can only be built through time and conversation, so if we're to grow in our love and knowledge of Jesus, in our relationship with Him, then we need make time to pray — every day!

Second, through Scripture. St. Jerome, the great Bible scholar, once said, 'Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ'. So, if we're to know *who* Jesus is and *what* He's done for us, then we need to read the Bible. I recommend starting with the New Testament, and then going back into the Old Testament for a deeper understanding. And since the Bible *is* the Word of God, reading it with prayer is the perfect way of discovering and listening to God's voice.

Third, through the Saints. If prayer is conversation with Christ and Scripture is His Word to speaking to us, then listening to what the Saints have to say about their life with Jesus is like talking with His family and friends. Our knowledge of Jesus and our intimacy with Him can grow tremendously through a dialogue with the Saints, by reading about their lives and experiences, and by feeding our prayer life with their spiritual writings.

These three things: prayer, Scripture and the Saints — these are the indispensable means of deepening our relationship with Jesus and strengthening our love for Him; these are the tools required for our mission of evangelisation, for bearing faithful witness to *who* Jesus is and *what* He's done for us. But of course, as St. Pope John Paul II reminded us, all of this is rooted in the Holy Spirit working in our lives, giving us the grace to grow in faith, in love, and in holiness, and increasing our capacity to be faithful and courageous witnesses in the world, for the world.

This is the vocation of the whole Church, not just of the clergy, but of *all* the baptised, each one of us. May we be faithful to the instructions Jesus has given us, and so come to share in the place He has prepared for us. Amen.