



Ascension of the Lord—Year B

Acts 1:1-11; Ephesians 1:17-23; Mark 16:15-20

There is a story that tells of how when Jesus arrived back in heaven, his Father asked him whom he had left to carry on his mission on earth. Jesus proudly told God that his friends would do it. And God replied, *“You mean Peter—who betrayed you, and Judas—who sold you, and all the rest—who ran away when you were crucified? You mean to tell me that you left them to carry on your work?”* Jesus answered, *“Yes, Father, those are the very ones,”* And God said, *“What is your backup plan?”* Jesus answered, *“I have no other plan—it must work.”*

Jesus has no other plan than to depend on the efforts of his followers! *“Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature.”*

Far from having left us on our own when he ascended into heaven, Jesus is even closer to us now. He is with us at all times and in all places, releasing a new energy upon the earth, the energy of the Holy Spirit to preach his Good News of salvation by bearing witness to him.

The challenge it sets before us is a spiritual one: Are we faithful to his teaching in our lives, and do we carry its message into our world? We must now be his witnesses *“. . . to the ends of the world.”* To be a Christian is to proclaim and evangelize. We preach with words, but we proclaim with our lives.

As we celebrate the Lord’s return to his Father in heaven, we should remember that we are commissioned to go forth and proclaim the Gospel of life and love, of hope and peace, and of forgiveness and salvation by the witnessing of our lives.

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Ascension. Why is this important? How does it relate to the paschal mystery of our salvation? The ascension is very essential. Before the incarnation, the second

person of the Holy Trinity was pure spirit. But, in incarnation he took our human nature; he took a human body like ours. Then he was killed but rose from the dead. He did not leave his body behind. He rose with that human body, but a glorified body, a body that could come in through closed doors, a body that still had the mark of the wounds.

Jesus ascended with this glorified human body. He is now at the right hand of God with his sanctified human body. Thus, he sanctified human nature *and* the human body. He is there forever. Christ brought human nature into eternity. His presence with his Father is a perpetual offering to the Father. Therefore, the Incarnation is complete only in the Ascension.

Today, we need to renew our commitment to be Christ’s true disciples everywhere—in our families and neighborhoods, in our places of work, and in our parishes—*“living in a manner worthy of the call we have received.”* We also have a teaching mission. Jesus taught us lessons of faith, hope, forgiveness, mercy, redemption, and love. Although no longer visibly present in the world, he is present in his words in the Holy Bible and in the Holy Eucharist. The ascended Jesus is the source of our strength and encouragement.

One convert was asked what prompted his conversion. He replied very tersely, *“A Christian gentleman living on my block. He found time to take care of me when I was ill.”* That convert is but one of many searchers. So many people today long to understand the reason for their existence. So many people are seeking meaning for their lives. Christians are called to provide this meaning. We are called to live the presence of the Lord upon earth.

Now, God has chosen us to be his witnesses. By our lives we are either affirming Christ or denying Christ. This feast is not so much about where Jesus went as it is about where we are supposed to go. When Christ left this world, he put his mission and message in our hands—a mission to proclaim the good news and make disciples for him.

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 12 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 more delighted to hear that he has provided you with a congregation.”*

Living our Christian lives—and preaching the good news—begins at home.