

Ascension of the Lord – May 12-13, 2018

I pointed out last week that the Sunday Gospels have been giving us since Easter a progressive revelation of Jesus' love and care for us.

In these last Sundays he has told us that he is our Good Shepherd, that he is the Vine and we are the branches, and finally, last Sunday he told us that he chose us to be one with him as his friends.

If we have any curiosity, we might wonder what Jesus is leading up to with all this talk of intimacy and sharing of life with us. Well, this Sunday get the answer.

Although the focus today seems to be on the ascension of Jesus to glory at the right hand of God the Father, the real focus of the celebration of the Ascension. we will see, is on us.

Jesus ascends to glory in heaven, but at the same time he gives us the great commission to complete the mission he began on earth. The reign of God was definitively established in work of Jesus on earth, but, it is not yet fulfilled. That will be the task of his disciples and all of us.

“Go out to all the world, and proclaim the gospel to every creature,” is call given to us in the Gospel, and in the other readings today we are told about the many graces we have received through Jesus' Ascension to carry out this mission.

There is a choice of two second readings today, and in the first one that we did not read, Paul prays that “the eyes of our hearts might be enlightened to see what is “the surpassing greatness of Christ's power for us who believe.” In the reading that we did hear today, Paul says that “Christ is raised up in power over all and in all, but that grace was poured out on each of us according to the measure of Christ's gifts.” Jesus receives power and authority; he shares that power and authority with us.

Jesus receives glory with God the Father, but we receive the great commission. Actually, there have been many persons given exciting commissions in their lifetimes. There was Michelangelo's commission to paint the ceiling of the Sistine chapel in Rome, Sir Christopher Wren was given the commission to rebuild St. Paul's Cathedral in London following the great fire of 1666. More recently, the US Navy Seals had the mission to get the terrorist Osama Bin Laden, dead or alive. But, in our life, there is an even greater commission given to us all in today's Gospel – "Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature."

Jesus asks us to be witnesses of God's presence in the world and to not leave anyone in the darkness. All of us can do this. We who have heard the story of Jesus and experienced his love in our lives are now called to bring that love into the lives of others and into the lives we share as families, as the church and as the human community. We are all called to continue Jesus' work to teach, to witness and to heal in our own small corner of the world and to hand on the story and experience of Jesus that has been handed on to us.

There is the funny story of a new army recruit standing at attention on the drill field. The drill instructor yells, "Forward, march!" and all the ranks begin to move, except this one new recruit. He is still standing there at attention. So the drill instructor goes over to him and yells in his right ear, "Is this thing working?" "Sir, yes, sir!" the recruit yells. Then the drill instructor walks around to the other ear and yells, "Is this thing working?" "Sir, yes, sir" the soldier says. "Then why didn't you march when I gave the order?" "Sir, I didn't hear you call my name."

Some of us are like that soldier standing around waiting for God to call our names. But the great commission given by Jesus on the day of his

Ascension is a blanket order. It has everyone's name on it. It is your mission and my mission.

The size and scope of the work he the disciples is awesome. They are asked to proclaim the gospel, baptize believers, give witness, prophesy, evangelize, pastor, teach. And all of this they are to do throughout the whole world to the ends of the earth. But this work was not to be completed only by those disciples who lived at the same time as Jesus. It is to be completed by all disciples throughout all time. So it is also our mission today to do these things as well.

But we are not called to do all this on our own. The Holy Spirit, whose outpouring we will celebrate next Sunday in Pentecost is with us. "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you" Jesus said to the apostles in today's first reading. When the Holy Spirit came upon the first disciples they were able to go out with great boldness and power to continue Jesus' mission.

Paul tells us that Jesus ascended on high, but he gave gifts to humanity -- empowering some to be apostles, others prophets, evangelizers, pastors and teachers to equip the holy ones for their ministry and for the building up of the body of Christ.

With the Holy Spirit's help the early disciples were able to handle the challenges of Jesus' mission in their day -- namely the formation of the new community of the Church, the opposition of the Jewish community, and the struggle of Gentile converts to leave their old ways of life behind, etc.

Those were the issues confronted by the first generation of the Church. What are the issues facing the present generation of the Church? Today we face the challenge of materialism, relativism, lack of faith and distractions of every kind in people's lives. Yet today as then, the

Holy Spirit continues to equip and empower us for our mission.

It so happens that the papal prayer intention for this month found on our monthly calendar is: Evangelization – the mission of the laity, and the prayer is that lay people may fulfill their special mission by responding with creativity to the challenges that face the world today.

One of the ways that the Holy Spirit is working in our day that we will be hearing more about is the new plan of the Diocese of Crookston and the Diocese of Fargo to work together in helping all parishes to better understand our mission, give training in how to share our faith better, and help all to work together in carrying out our mission. Each parish in our two dioceses is asked to call forth 2-3 delegates to begin gathering information about the needs of their parishes and preparing for a convocation of these delegates in Fargo at the end of November where there will be training and planning to help parishes to carry out this commission we all have from Jesus. If this sounds exciting to you, maybe you should come and talk to me about being a delegate from our parish.

It is a big challenge, but it is also exciting to imagine how we might truly move from being more maintenance in our outlook to being mission minded. Sometimes we need a little jolt to get going. There is the story of a father who always faithfully taught his children to live for the Lord and be active in the Church, etc. But many ignored his words. He spoke them again later in life, but this time he died. The children could no longer so easily dismiss or ignore their father's words. And some of them turned their lives around.

Likewise, for many years Jesus told his disciples the things he wanted them to do. Much of this was ignored or not acted upon. However, when Jesus ascended, His disciples could not so easily dismiss his words. May we receive this grace of

Ascension today. May we respond to Jesus' words and take them seriously that all may know the presence of God's mercy and healing and goodness operative in the world and flowing from power of his death and resurrection.

Finally, let us see in the Ascension that our real home is to be with God. Where Jesus has gone is where he wants to bring us. At the last supper he told us, "I am going to prepare a place for you and I will come back and take you with me that where I am you also may be. Today's feast is about not getting too attached to our present life. The Ascension of Jesus shows us what he has in mind for us. As we heard on Easter Sunday: "Seek first the things that are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father." ---Amen.