

Ascension of the Lord (A)
(Acts 1:1-11 / Matthew 28:16-20)
01.06.2014

The mystery of the Ascension which we celebrate today carries within it the promise of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to equip us for mission.

We heard in the Acts of the Apostles: *You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.*

The text goes on to read: *And then you will be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judea and Samaria, and indeed to the ends of the earth.*

From what we read in the Acts of the Apostles we are led to understand that Jesus' resurrection life (as witnessed in the forty days between his rising from the dead and His ascension into heaven) was not seen as an end in itself. The possibility of an encounter with the Risen Lord is not reserved only to Jesus' closest associates and disciples from His earthly lifetime; it is a possibility open to all of us.

The message of new life – indeed, a share in the life of the Risen Christ – which the Church has for mission to proclaim is for all the nations of the world.; it is for people of every age and generation, including our own.

The gospel passage we hear this morning further underlines this.

Jesus' resurrection life is for you and for me ... and through us for many others, for we are sent on mission to *all the nations*. We are sent to bring Christ to all peoples.

It befalls all of us to announce the Good News the world over.

The Church's mission is not just the responsibility of some specialised missionaries.

It is *our* responsibility!

It seems to me that there is a key word that is addressed to us this morning and that we must really hear, take to heart and strive to live by, not just for ourselves, but also, for others: ***I am with you always.***

The invitation is to hear this word of promise as a word spoken to us both personally and communally.

The Lord is with His Church, His Body, and He is with each one of us personally.

Christ is closer to us than we are to ourselves.

Christ is within each one of us, while we live so much of the time outside of ourselves!

Because of our absence/distance from our true self, we miss out so much upon the share in Christ's resurrection life made to us.

The Lord who is with us personally is also with us communally.

He is with all who are in Christ, especially when they are drawn together and are of one heart in

order to witness with one voice.

On this last point, John's gospel leaves us in no doubt.

The credibility of our proclamation of the gospel depends upon our being (at least it depends upon our striving to be) *one in Christ*.

Christian unity is fundamental to mission.

Christian unity is something we must give attention to for the sake of mission.

The disciples were drawn together to the place of Christ's Ascension to be commissioned and sent out as a body – as one – to make Christ present in the world.

If Matthew's gospel opened with the announce of Jesus' birth and the explanation that His name would be *Emmanuel – God with us* – it ends with the assurance that *God is with us* to the end of time.

Over and beyond the person of the man Jesus, God is with the Church, in the Risen Christ who lives forever in the hearts of the faithful.

God is with us, His people.

The Risen Lord is in the Church, His body. In and through the Church He is alive and active, wanting to be present to the world.

We could say that the whole of Matthew's gospel has for purpose to remind us of this fundamental truth: Christ's permanent presence with humanity.

The call addressed to us today is a call to see this.

When the two men dressed in white, who are spoken of in the Acts of the Apostles, challenged the disciples with the words, *Why are you men from Galilee, standing looking into the sky?*, what they were saying effectively amounted to this: *your focus has to change!*

Our focus also has to change!

Jesus is no longer present just before His disciples: He is now present within them.

He is present within us!

This is the great truth to which today's feast would have us awaken.

This is what we must realise: the Lord is with us, He is within us.

The Lord is in you and He is in me.

It is for us to acknowledge Him where He already is and for us to lead others to recognise where He is always waiting to be found: within!

What today's feast would have us realise is that the power of the resurrection is at work within us and furthermore that we should carry Him to others, to all those to whom we are sent.

The Risen Christ is the mission we carry to others. The words of an Irish blessing remind us of this when they say: *Christ is the mission we carry to others*.

In John's gospel Jesus speaks to His disciples of Himself as having been *consecrated and sent into the world*.

He speaks too of the disciples having been *consecrated and sent into the world*: consecrated for mission.

We have been consecrated and are sent into the world.

We are all on mission simply by virtue of our baptismal consecration.

Our mission is not to bring to others something outside of themselves, but to awaken them to a realisation of the very breath and life of God that each person carries within.

May today's feast confirm and strengthen us in and for that mission!

May we immerse peoples everywhere in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit!

When I formulate the wish that we may immerse people in God, I do not mean to imply that we should submerge people with our ideologies; I do not mean that we should flood or drown people in any way.

Rather, what I am saying is that we should simply surround people with, bathe them in, what God is essentially: *loving kindness, tender, gentle mercy and gracious compassion*.

This is what being immersed in God is all about: being covered by, bathed in the gentle tide of His loving kindness, tender mercy and gracious compassion.

The closing words of Matthew's gospel make it clear to us that the God we have for mission to announce and make known is a God who is in Himself loving relationship: He is the communion of love of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Finally, I would want to insist that our celebration of the Ascension should not lead us to see Christ as having been pushed up into the skies to be held there, out of sight, out of mind, remote or at a safe distance, as it were

Rather today's celebration should lead us to know Christ to be present within us.

It should lead us to understand the Lord to be close and accessible to us, wanting to be close and accessible to others in and through us.

May we recognise the Risen Christ to be all around us in everyone we encounter and in everything that we experience!

May we be able to echo to those to whom we are sent words along the lines of those words first given to Moses to speak: *I am has sent me to you ... I am who is I am with you* has sent me to you ... He has sent me to you to awaken you to the fact that He is already living within you!

Without formulating the words as such, by our mode of presence to others, may we say to those to whom we are sent that we have been consecrated and sent to them with this fundamental mission: to lead them to recognise that God is living within them!

If only we and all people were simply aware of Christ's Risen life within our lives, then the world and all its inhabitants would know the love, joy and peace for which people long!

Amen!