



Lectio Divina. Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord. Year B

Province of India, Kuttikad, Sr. Daisy Rose Peenikaparamban, May 16, 2021.- When Jesus ascended, the disciples were empowered to proclaim the Gospel.

GOSPEL

Mark 16, 15 - 20

¹⁵He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all creation. ¹⁶Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. ¹⁷And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; ¹⁸they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.”¹⁹ After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. ²⁰Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.

STUDYING THE TEXT

The episode of Jesus' ascension into heaven is a moment departure, a conclusive event necessary to be able to start again. It is not by chance that this event is not only the end of the Gospels, but also the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles. It is an event that generates life precisely because it allows us to take leave of what has happened. It is a joyful highpoint of

the Liturgical year and New Testament treats the Feast of Ascension as an integral part of the Easter Event.

The liturgy this year uses the account from Mark's Gospel, narrating the sending out of His disciples on mission and the eagerness with which the disciples accomplished it.

Three truths that the solemnity of Ascension upholds:

1. Jesus went back to heaven and He is seated at God's right hand.
2. Jesus was welcomed at God's right hand, so too, we shall be welcomed.
3. Ascension of Jesus points to the Church's mission of evangelization. Church exists to evangelize. *EN 14*.

This text emphasizes the missionary responsibility of believers. This was the final command, the last testament of the Risen Lord before his Ascension. The followers of Christ seek to Christianize the world, beginning with their own hearts. For as long as they continue to carry him in their hearts and proclaim him to the world, the disciples will feel the Lord's presence with them, and they will see, to their surprise, that they are capable of performing the same wonders that Jesus did. The Lord has ascended to heaven, but to make Him present on earth it is enough to proclaim Him. If the disciples do not want to feel left alone and be abandoned, all they have to do is to carry the message of the Gospel to the whole world. The Gospel, if it is preached, will save Christians from feeling lonely and will confer on them unexpected powers.

This Gospel passage is traversed with verbs of movement: Go, Preach. Jesus invites them to go. And in the end the disciples show that they have accepted Jesus' invitation, in fact they set out and preached. A change took place in their lives and they started to move again accepting the call to mission.

(V.15-16): We note in these verses that the call to mission includes a charge to baptize. The word 'Gospel' refers not to a doctrine but to the very person of Jesus. Thus, "preach the Gospel" means to announce the person of Jesus effectively. Baptism became the way in which those who did not have a first-hand encounter with the Christ event were brought into an experience of it.

(V. 17-18): During His earthly ministry, Jesus sends his disciples into the world to preach, giving them the power to drive out demons and heal the sick (LK 10:1-10). Driving out demons, picking up snakes, drinking any deadly thing, laying hands on the sick, speaking in tongues.... (Mt 10:8). As Jesus was about to leave, He reconfirmed this power on His disciples with all His authority. Thus, the missionaries of the Gospel were able to work signs that confirmed the word. Jesus' power against the force of evil is a gift to His followers. This is a reassurance that the missionaries will be under the protection of the Risen Lord who

will be with them always. This communion with Jesus is expressed through concrete signs, to communicate where it seems impossible, to enter unknown contexts, to inhabit cultures that seem distant; they will be able to handle snakes, they will be able to handle malice and slander, they will not be touched by the poison that enemies will put into their lives and into the life of the community; they will heal the sick, bring consolation, heal the wounds of a world torn apart by hatred and selfishness.

(V.19): Jesus' departure was a moment of transition of the Church from the glory of the Resurrection to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. *'He sat at the right hand of God'*. This is a symbolic language for Jesus' entry into God's presence. "Right hand" is an expression for shared authority in the Old Testament (Psalm 110:1). Jesus who sits at the right hand of God is a hope for all those who in obedience to their mission proclaim the Good News throughout the whole world.

(V.20): There are two dimensions present here. The apostles are sent out on mission and Jesus was with them. Along with the change there is also a promise: even when the disciples thought they had to face the events of the world alone, the Lord acted with them. It is true, the context is different, but Jesus does not abandon them!

MEDITATION

1. When someone leaves us, we normally experience a profound sense of absence. In the Ascension Jesus leaves but actually remains with them. When we take up His mission to preach the Gospel, He will never abandon us. In the preceding verse Jesus had rebuked the Apostles for their lack of faith (v.14). Despite this, He commissioned them to proclaim the Good News to the whole world. This is an encouragement for us as the witnesses of the Gospel do not have to be perfect.
2. Before He ascended to take "His seat at the right hand of God" Jesus entrusted His saving mission to "Preach the Gospel" to the disciples. When the Gospel is effectively preached by "those who believe", it is accompanied by signs.
3. Jesus tells them that their witness will have quite dramatic effects, helping people to overcome demons, bring them peace and healing. Things happen when we believe in the power of the Lord. Strong faith can enable us to face and overcome difficulties that are beyond our capacity otherwise.
4. The Ascension marked the end of the visible presence of Jesus with the disciples, but He remained with them always and worked with them. Sometimes we can experience that death is not the end of the presence of someone significant to us. We can

experience the unseen presence and influence of a parent, a friend, or an inspiring leader after they have died.

INTERIORIZATION

- 1. How do you set out to proclaim the Gospel today?**
- 2. What signs accompany you when you preach the Good News?**

PRAYER

Dear Lord Jesus Christ, right before your Ascension into heaven you told your apostles to be your witnesses to the ends of the earth upon receiving the Holy Spirit. May I be similarly inspired to spread your Gospel message in word and deed, according to your will for me. And may I do so prudently and joyfully, with your help, your guidance, and your grace! And remembering this glorious event, help me to seek what is above, Heaven, where you are seated at the right hand of God the Father!

CONTEMPLATION

I contemplate in silence the presence of the Lord. “the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it”. I let this sentence saturate the depth of my being and let the words resound within me... I enjoy the rhythm of His perfect closeness... and His mighty hands at work in me...

COMMITMENT

I will give witness to Jesus’ presence by...