

Ascension - A
Acts 1:1-11;
Ephesians 1:17-23;
Matthew 28:16-20
Little Flower - 5/28/17

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord. Celebrating the Ascension of Jesus, we celebrate Jesus' return to his Father, his exaltation at the right hand of his Father, and his empowerment to send the Holy Spirit. Paradoxically, today we also celebrate Jesus' entrusting the Church to us. When the angel said to the apostles, "*Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky?*" the message to the apostles was that Jesus was now entrusting the Church to them. They could not simply be stargazers passively waiting for Jesus to return in glory. Jesus continues to entrust the Church to us today.

First, and most importantly, Jesus was entrusting his ministry and mission to them. The heart of that ministry and mission is found in Jesus' words in today's Gospel: "*Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.*" Many non-Catholic Christians call these verses the Great Commission. If Jesus continues to entrust the Church to us today, all of us are called to be evangelizers and re-evangelizers in word and deed.

However, today I would like to focus on another aspect of Jesus' entrusting the Church to us. Last Sunday I mentioned that the Church was more adaptable when it was small and young. For example, I sometimes like to say that storefront churches have a major advantage over us. They can be very nimble. Their resources go almost entirely to their ministries. They do not have a large campus to care for and support as we do.

We, however, are living in the mature Church. We have an advantage the storefront churches do not have. We have stability. We are able to be the anchor for this community. However, a large campus, especially one with buildings as old as some of ours are, requires a lot of resources. Likewise, we have a multitude of ministries to support. To establish, maintain, and develop our many ministries likewise requires a lot of time, talent, and treasure.

My point is that Little Flower Parish, all of it, is in our hands, actually your hands more than mine. Many years ago, when Fr. Paul Shikany was pastor at Holy Trinity, Edinburgh, I helped him with his Lenten programs. Holy Trinity, Edinburgh, never had a resident pastor. In some ways, I think that was good for the parish. The parishioners had a real sense of buy-in or ownership of the parish. They were never short of volunteers for their ministries. If the parish was going to survive and thrive, it depended on them, and they knew that.

Over the years I have frequently said that Little Flower is not just surviving but thriving. However, for that to continue, as many of the pillars of our parish get older, we need more people, especially our younger people, to take ownership and invest themselves in the parish. In every generation, a parish needs parishioners who are passionate about the parish and are willing to make sacrifices for the parish. The forefathers and foremothers of our parish made great sacrifices for this parish. We all have to fight the consumer mentality which suggests that the parish is a provider of services from which we can simply pick and choose.

My brothers and sisters, Jesus' final words in today's Gospel continue to be his promise today: "*And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.*" I would suggest that this promise is the basis for our hope. I would suggest that this promise empowers us to accept responsibility for this small part of the universal Church, Little Flower Parish.