

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today's reading from Acts of the Apostles tells the story of Jesus' Ascension into heaven. There are at least four key themes in the story. First, Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would come upon them and empower them to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. At the same time, he told them that it was not for them to know when God's kingdom would come.

After Jesus had finished speaking, "*as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him from their sight.*" The image is a spatial image. Therefore, it conveys a physical separation between Jesus and his apostles. In other words, he would no longer be physically present to them. They would no longer be able to see him, to hear his words, or to touch him. However, it also conveys an experiential separation. In other words, the apostles' experience of Jesus would be very different from what it had been before. They would experience Jesus as we do: in the Eucharist, in his Word, in others, and in his Spirit living within and among us.

However, the final words of the angel are probably the most relevant to us today: "*Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven.*" The message to the apostles was that Jesus was now entrusting the Church to them. Jesus was entrusting his ministry and mission to them. The last two weeks I have mentioned the early Church's adaptability. The process of adaptation can never stop. Change is an essential part of the Church if we are to remain faithful to our origins and to the purpose for which we exist.<sup>1</sup>

Evangelical Christians often refer to Jesus' words in today's Gospel as the Great Commission. Jesus' commission has three parts: first, "*Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations,*" second, "*baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,*" and third, "*teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.*"

Adaptation and mission are going to be key words for us as we move forward with *Connected in the Spirit*. Our parishes are changing. Therefore, we have to be willing to adapt to those changes. One of those changes for us will be collaborating and working with Holy Spirit and Our Lady of Lourdes. Second, Pope Francis is stressing the need for the Church to become a more missionary church. In other words, we as a community and as individuals are being asked to share the Good News of Jesus with others, inviting others to become disciples of Jesus, preparing and baptizing them, and then teaching them to observe all that Jesus has commanded. If I have a concern for Little Flower as we move forward with *Connected in the Spirit*, it is that since another parish was not merged into or linked with us, we will believe and act as though this really does not affect us that much. If we start with this assumption, we will find it difficult to commit ourselves to working with Holy Spirit and Our Lady of Lourdes to strengthen some existing ministries and to begin some new needed ministries.

My brothers and sisters, in the face of changes and new challenges, Jesus' promise in today's Gospel should give us the courage and the strength to adapt: "*And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.*"

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<sup>1</sup>Aelred Cody, "The Foundation of the Church: Biblical Criticisms for Ecumenical Discussion," *Theological Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 1, March, 1973, p. 1. "Among the constant, necessary concerns of all committed members of the Church is that of remaining faithful to our origins and to the purpose for which we exist, while adapting ourselves institutionally and individually to the requirements of our own times."