

Ascension - B
Acts 1:1-11;
Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-13;;
Mark 16:15-20
Little Flower - 5/13/18

My Brothers and Sisters,

The parish staff and I want to wish all mothers a very happy and blessed Mother's Day.

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of the Ascension of Jesus. Forty days after Easter Jesus ascended into heaven and was seated at the right hand of his Father. This feast is important for two reasons. The Ascension marks Jesus' glorification at the right hand of his Father from whence he shall come to judge the living and the dead. Second, at the Last Supper, Jesus told his disciples that it was good for them that he go because he could only send the Holy Spirit upon them if he returned to the Father [Jn. 16:7].

Before his Ascension, Jesus commissioned his apostles, "*Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature.*" However, as Jesus was ascending, his disciples were staring intently at the sky. "*Suddenly two men dressed in white garments stood beside them. They said, 'Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky?'*"

After Jesus' resurrection, the disciples had gone back to being simply disciples or followers of Jesus. When the angels asked them why they were standing there staring at the sky, they were telling the disciples that Christians cannot be stargazers, i.e., they cannot be passive as they await Christ's return in glory. The angels were reminding them that Jesus had entrusted the Church to them, that they were now responsible for fulfilling the mission Jesus had given them. That mission was to "*Go into the whole world and proclaim the good news to all creation*" [NAB, 1966]. That mission has now been entrusted to us.

Today's reading from Paul's Letter to the Ephesians offers some guideposts for sharing the Good News of Jesus. First, Paul calls the Ephesians as individuals and as a community to live a life worthy of their call, "*with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love.*" He then stresses the importance of unity within the Christian community. In other words, we proclaim the Good News or Gospel of Jesus Christ by living Christian virtues and by living as a community united in faith, love, and hope.

Paul also tells the Ephesians that "*grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.*" He goes on to list some of the gifts: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. In other words, all of us as unique individuals are gifts to the Church in our uniqueness. Elsewhere St. Paul makes the very important point that "*to each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good*" [I Cor. 12:7; NAB, 1970]. In other words, all of our specific gifts and talents have been given to us not only for our own benefit but to build up the Body of Christ. If we want to effectively proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ, we have to look at our gifts and talents individually and collectively and ask ourselves how these gifts can help to bring Christ to others and others to Christ.

My brothers and sisters, in 2013, Pope Francis offered a profound insight into the mystery of the Ascension, "the Ascension does not point to Jesus' absence but tells us that he is alive in our midst in a new way. He is no longer in a specific place in the world as he was before the Ascension. He is now in the lordship of God, present in every space and time, close to each one of us" [General Audience, April 17, 2013]. Next Sunday we will celebrate Pentecost, the coming of the promised Holy Spirit. This week the Church asks us to prepare for Pentecost by praying daily for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit: "Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And You shall renew the face of the earth."