

THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD

THE GREAT COMMISSION

How important is the ascension of the Lord to His disciples and to us today? In His teachings to His disciples Jesus mentioned that He had to go to where He came from. This made them sad, so He said to them, "I did not tell you this from the beginning, because I was with you; but now I am going to the one who sent me...Still I am telling you the truth; it is for your own good that I am going, because unless I go the Paraclete will not come to you; but if I go I will send Him to you," (Jn.16:4b-7).

After the resurrection the disciples were happy that their Master had returned to life and there was some joy and renewed hope. Jesus spent forty days after the resurrection to let His followers know that He was alive. A long period to prove that He was really alive. But He had to leave them again, and this brought a big disappointment to them. The apostles had hope that the promised kingdom would be restored at that time; so they asked; "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" But Jesus had a different idea about the coming of the kingdom. His kingdom is heavenly, not earthly kingdom.

He knew He was going away and there was the need for them to continue with His work, so He told them that the Holy Spirit would descend upon them and they would be His witnesses. This is mentioned both in the first reading and the gospel. This was the great commission; "to go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature."

The resurrection and the ascension reveals to us the power of God, and His power for us who believe. The ascension of the Lord is not a desertion by the Lord but to empower us to be His witnesses and to make known the love and power of God to the world. As we heard in the second reading, "grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift, And He gave some as apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, others as pastors and teachers, to equip the holy ones for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God."

Even though the disciples were with Jesus and they witnessed many miracles, they did not understand many of the things He told them. He knew it and that was why He told them that it was necessary for Him to go so that the Holy Spirit would come to teach them to understand everything. The Spirit was also to give them the courage and wisdom they needed to continue with His work.

The ascension of the Lord is our hope that the heaven gate is opened. It is also to remind us that where the Master is we shall also be. But before we go there, we have to be faithful witnesses to both the resurrection and the ascension. We are to make good use of the gifts the Holy Spirit has brought us when we believed.

After every mass we are sent to glorify God by our lives. This is a reminder of the great commission given to the followers of Christ to make disciples for Him. "The apostles went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs."

Thus, as the Lord told them that He would not leave them orphans so He will not leave us orphans. "I shall not leave you orphans; I shall come to you. In a short time the world will no longer see me; but you will see that I live and you also will live," (Jn. 14:18-19). He worked with them; and He will work with us. But how are we doing our part in the spreading of the Good News?

We have been told that different gifts have been given to different people for building up the body of Christ. This means each has a part to play in the great commission. No one is left out. Let us ask ourselves what we do after mass when we go home to indicate that we have been sent to evangelize? what shows that we have been sent to make disciples for the Lord? Many of us do not think that it is part of our Christian obligation to share the message we hear at mass with others. It is not necessary for us to do what others do, moving from house to house preaching, but there are many ways of letting others know about our faith in the risen Lord. A friendly chat with someone, and even a smile can turn somebody's heart to the Lord.

In order to receive the Holy Spirit, Jesus asked the disciples to remain in Jerusalem. And we read from the Acts of the Apostles that they were in an upper room always praying. Very soon the promised gift will come, so we are to start preparing ourselves by praying and reflecting on His word.