

The Faithful in the Age of Disbelief
Part 8. Anticipated Tasks of the Faithful
Acts 1:1-12

Over the last couple of weeks, I felt more and more the fact that I am living in the age of disbelief. What I have learned in school and in the church was not accepted by the majority people around the world.

- Racial injustice in Baltimore and many other places around the nation make us sad and the ways people handle situations make us sadder.
- People like us suffer from natural disaster.
- Some people seek out political power for presidential leadership for next presidential term.
- Capital punishment, along with death penalty is a less favored choice we make for an act of justice. I saw some folks feel happy and satisfied with death penalty on taking lives of their beloved. An eye for an eye – an act of retaliation.

Today we as a church celebrate **Jesus' Ascension** – a historic event in Jesus' day! Ascension of Jesus reminds us of a life of the faithful in the age of disbelief.

(source: <http://www.churchyear.net/ascension.html>)

Along with the resurrection, the ascension functioned as a proof of Jesus' claim that he was the Messiah. The Ascension is also the event whereby humanity was taken into heaven. Finally, the ascension was also the "final blow" so-to-speak against Satan's power, and thus the lion (Jesus) conquering the dragon (Satan) is a symbol of the ascension. Early Christian art and iconography portrayed the ascension frequently, showing its importance to the early Church.

The Catholic Catechism summarizes three important theological aspects (with which most Christian churches agree) of the Ascension concisely:

- Christ's Ascension marks the definitive entrance of Jesus' humanity into God's heavenly domain, whence he will come again (cf. Acts 1:11); this humanity in the meantime hides him from the eyes of men (cf. Col 3:3).
- Jesus Christ, the head of the Church, precedes us into the Father's glorious kingdom so that we, the members of his

Body, may live in the hope of one day being with him for ever.

- Jesus Christ, having entered the sanctuary of heaven once and for all, intercedes constantly for us as the mediator who assures us of the permanent outpouring of the Holy Spirit (665-667).

What we celebrate today is the fact that we have received the **anticipated tasks** as the faithful followers of Jesus Christ!

Acts 1:1-11 In my former book, *Theophilus*, I wrote about **all that Jesus began to do and to teach** ² until the day he was taken up to heaven, after **giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen**. ³ After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. **He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.** ⁴ On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." ⁶ So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ **But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.**" ⁹ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. ¹⁰ They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹ **"Men of Galilee,"** they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? **This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.**"

1. *Jesus' movement continues with Theophilus.*

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The gospel is for Theophilus – God’s beloved. The story about God’s mighty acts in Jesus is not for sale, but for our spiritual growth – 1) learning the grace of God that found me for His Kingdom, 2) inspiring you and me to develop gifts for His Kingdom, and 3) bears fruits “that will last” (John 15:16) - Fruits of the Spirit – **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).** Love,

John 15:16 ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit-- fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.

Galatians 5:19-26 ¹⁹ **The acts of the sinful nature** are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²² **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control.** Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Jesus at His ascension gave us the tasks of the church – a gathering of the faithful followers of Jesus Christ.

You and I are special people! God’s Beloved!
Called by God for His Kingdom!

Today is the day we affirm that you and I as ones who are chosen for a special job – joyous and exciting.

The Gospel writer Luke dedicated a book –

- Collection of God’s love story for His people
- message of Jesus Christ,
- law of Christ
- manual to bring forth God’s Kingdom where God is in charge!

The gospel lesson this morning is not for someone else, but for you and me – God’s beloved. You are hired by God. You are beloved and well-trusted by God for His Kingdom.

2. Receive the Holy Spirit.

It is the key to acknowledge God’s secret message – revelation to you and me the faithful. Although you live in the age of disbelief, you can see truth. By the power of the Holy Spirit you can have right perspective, right perception, and right principles for successful life!

Who is the one with the Holy Spirit?

Those who are with the Holy Spirit know about “the right things to do” even in the midst of confusions and chaotic situations in life.

Receiving the Holy Spirit is to restore a broken image of God, with which you and I was created. It is about we become more like God, as the merciful!

Luke 6:35-38 ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.

³⁶ **Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.**

³⁷ "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. ³⁸ Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

Over the last week, I spent time with my boys to, search out colleges – 10 best colleges in the United States of America and abroad, in our town as well as in the State we live.

So many attractions and future placements with selectivity, level of education, influence, and learning environment. Of course none of school talks about the Holy Spirit, which is the spiritual force to inspire you - the faithful of God – to fit for His Creation!

Once you are with the Holy Spirit, you are able to see what God can see – beauty, goodness and truth! The author of life will allow you to see what would be a path that placed for you for a joyous and successful life here on earth as well as for a life eternity!

How to get the Holy Spirit? It begins with believing in Jesus Christ and accepting Him as your personal Savior and Lord. Honor His teaching!

Read His Gospel; learn His mind; master his lesson through the act of compassion and justice!

Jesus promised the gift of the Holy Spirit in John, especially in 14th chapter of the gospel.

John 14:23-27 ²³ Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. ²⁴ He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. ²⁵ "All this I have spoken while still with you.

²⁶ **But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.**

²⁷ **Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives.** Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Ephesians 2:14-17 ¹⁴ For **he himself is our peace**, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.

3. Be the witnesses of Jesus Christ!

We learn the great commission of Jesus Christ at His ascension. The tone of the commission we hear from the gospel of Luke sounds little different from that of the gospel of Luke, but eventually same thing – the anticipated tasks of the faithful.

For Matthean gospel, the great commission focuses on the role of the church as an agent of God's kingdom through a discipleship process; baptizing un-churched in the name of Jesus, God and the Holy Spirit, and teach and train people to become "disciples" of Jesus and expand God's Kingdom until the coming of Jesus. The gospel is associated with the principle. The church should bring up a group of faithful servants who can reproduce what was given as one who was entrusted with five talents. The church as bride of Christ should be wise in preparation of old in a lamp, that the lamp keeps burning. With the insight, the church is expected to equip Kingdom builders without ceasing.

*For the gospel lesson we read this morning emphasizes more on being witnesses of Jesus Christ from Jerusalem, all Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Luke's gospel is inclusive. It talks about church to be an inclusive agent of God's Kingdom. The ministry of the church begins with its own church. **Doing ministry with the church is not an end, but reaches out to the community where it stands.***

4. Bless others with the gospel up to the ends of the earth.

The gospel lesson this morning challenges us with the boundary of our ministry. Whether we stay within the boundary of the mission and ministries of the church for the benefits of its members and families? Whether we have to move beyond the boundary of our interest and connection?

Obviously, Jesus in the gospel of Luke anticipates His followers to move beyond the boundary. While thinking about thinking about a norm that "charity begins home," the lesson this morning helps us become more like Jesus, seeking souls not only within our home, but also to the ends of the earth.

Honestly however we, I at least" seem not succeeding in doing a productive job of blessing our family members within our life boundary. While leaning about inclusive ministry and outreach we exercise ourselves more and more exclusive: judging others, put favoritism on top of anything else, prioritize domestic matters.

We still love to be associated with only those who love us.

Think about ends of the earth! In Jesus' days the ends of the earth wasn't' simply a geographical end of the Christian territory. Actually, it was toward Rome, the center of secular world.

- *Perhaps our moving towards cities like Baltimore, Washington, D.C. with the*

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gospel can be applied with the lesson this morning.

Where are the ends of the earth? Where is Jerusalem?

- *The ends of the earth are not far away from where we are.*
- *Ironically it can be your home where God is not in charge any more.*
 - *It can be between spouses – a biblical unit of God's continuous creation, where love and respect bind them together.*
 - *It can be your neighborhood where peace and justice prevail.*
 - *It can be your work where trusted commitment, honest deal and fair trade should take place.*
 - *It can be our community where safety and wellbeing – where a dream home you and I find.*
 - *It can be schools where our young kids learn what they need for happy life.*

While celebrating Jesus' ascension, I pray for your faithful life with successful and joyous accomplishment on our tasks – the tasks our God assigned us through Jesus Christ.

May God bless you to be witnesses of Jesus Christ.

May God send the Holy Spirit, that he would teach us everything we need to accomplish what is pleasing to God!