

Ascension Sunday, 29 May 2022

Scriptures: Acts 1:1-11; Ephesians 1:17-23; Luke 24:46-53

Homily

The Easter season is coming to an end. During this time, we have heard again and again the core of the gospel message: the Lord is alive. He has conquered death and what it produces. This is the source of our hope (Eph. 1:18).

The gospels of Matthew and Mark conclude with the sending on a mission. What characterizes disciples is their preaching the good news. It consists in giving testimony of their encounters with the risen Christ. From that perspective, they see Christ's teachings in a new light. These are the gospels: an understanding of the deeds and words of Jesus from the perspective of Easter, the passage from death to life (Lk 24:46). The witnesses have come to that understanding (Lk 24:48 and Acts 1:8). In fact, witnesses do not limit themselves to reporting an event; they become involved with it, making it their own. Jesus "opened their minds to understand the scriptures" (Lk 24:45). This is why "after his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). Thus they are witnesses of the kingdom of life.

Perceiving the significance of events is not enough; it is also necessary to assume the responsibilities that witnessing involves. While Matthew and Mark emphasize the sending on a mission, Luke insists on the absence of Jesus while the disciples bear witness to him. Jesus has left them in charge of his mission, which they have to pursue on earth. The Son ascends into heaven at the right hand of the Father. But according to the lesson of these past Sundays, it is the absence of someone who is alive,

not that of a dead man. This is why Jesus sends “what the Father promised”: the Spirit (Lk 24:49 and Acts 1:4). The Spirit will help us make Jesus, the living one, present in the midst of a reality made of selfishness, of undue privileges, of the arrogance of political and religious power, of indifference toward the poor, and of hunger. In other words, death.

The feast of the Ascension that we celebrate this weekend, and the feast of Pentecost that we will celebrate next weekend, are feasts of Christian maturity. They are a call to continue Jesus’ mission with our insight into reality, our criteria and decisions. The “power of the Spirit” (Acts 1:7) is with us. We must not stand still looking up and lamenting the absence of the Lord; instead we must set on our way to take his gospel “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). This is why every attempt to keep Christians in an attitude of dependency and immaturity without real responsibilities and voice in the Church is contrary to the meaning of the feast we are celebrating today. The Second Vatican Council strongly emphasized this. Being mature in the faith is a requirement of the gospel, and adults have—ought to have—their opinions about the common task.

We are encouraged in this by the assurance that the Lord will return (Acts 1:11) because he is alive (Eph 1:20). But we are also concerned because at that time he will ask us to give an account of the talents he has entrusted to us.

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