

Homily on the feast of Ascension- B

The Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord is one of the great solemnities. It takes place forty days after Easter Sunday, which always falls on a Thursday, and often passes overlooked by the majority of Christians. That is why we are transferring the Ascension Day from Thursday to Sunday so that more people may participate in the celebration. What is the meaning and importance of the ascension of Jesus Christ?

The Church celebrates the Ascension, marking the end of the ministry of Jesus and the beginning of the mission of the Church. After his departure we are responsible to continue the work he inaugurated, "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). This missionary command is made not only to the apostles themselves but to all of the Disciples of Christ who are living today, 2000 years later. How seriously we take this mandate? That is the important question! If your father or mother asked you to do something as they are dying, will you take that seriously? This is the last thing Jesus told us to do before He ascended into heaven. How seriously have you taken this mandate? If you have taken this mandate seriously, each and every one of you listening to me, would have brought other people to Christ? How many people have you brought to Christ so far? In his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 'the joy of the Gospel, Pope Francis invites all people to a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. My life is much happier since I made a relationship with Christ. If that is true, then, I cannot keep that Joy to myself. I am sent as missionary disciples to share that joy and transform the world for Christ. I am called to be Spirit-filled disciple, not in a maintenance mode but rather in a missionary mode. (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 118-120, 259-262).

Once upon a time the Spanish missionaries were very powerful, very passionate about Christ and His mission and they were going all over the world to share the good news. The Carmelite missionaries from Spain came to India and established a seminary in the 18th century. When I was in formation there, we had almost 800 seminarians studying there. That is true even today. The Carmelites had a huge presence in Navarra Spain and was thriving. The church in Spain and Europe had two aspects at that point; becoming disciples and making disciples. But slowly they lost their purpose and fall into the trap of Satan and went into the maintenance mode and lost the missionary mode. As a result, if you go to Navarra today, the monastery is empty and the church is dying. Any church that doesn't focus on the missionary aspect, (making disciples) is a dying church. It is like, light without heat or salt without saltiness.

How can we accomplish this call to be a missionary disciple today? It starts with a personal encounter. The importance of a personal encounter with Jesus is emphasized by St. Luke in the opening words of his gospel as well as in the Acts of the Apostles, which we hear from today. Luke himself certainly believed many things about Jesus and the salvation he won for us, yet he was not satisfied with merely knowing facts about Jesus, he wanted to know Jesus at the level of a personal relationship.

Luke seeks to share this personal engagement with Theophilus as he describes to his friend the impact of Jesus and the "good news" in his own life: we ought to imitate this kind of person-to- person "mission"! Just as Luke so painstakingly assembled the gospel that bears his name and the Acts of the Apostles which we hear today, so too every baptized believer in Jesus is called to play some role, whether private or public, lay or clerical, formal or informal, in promoting the good news of Christ in our world. And this must be a personal engagement, like

that of Luke and Theophilus, because at the core of Christianity itself is a personal encounter.

During the celebration mass, there are many words that are more than mere words. Every word at the mass is said with a power and purpose that flies far beyond immediate meaning. Some command miracles, such as the words of consecration. Others command missions, such as the celebrant's dismissal when the Mass is ended. The end of every Mass is intended as a beginning. The word, "Mass," is derived from "dismissal," which is rooted in the idea of many people being sent forth upon different ways on a common mission. The priest's dismissal, therefore, is not merely a statement inviting the congregation to take their leave, but rather a restatement of Christ's commandment to His apostles: "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature" if you really encounter Christ at this Mass, we have no choice but share Him.

In John's Gospel, Jesus refers to Himself as being sent by the Father no less than thirty-eight times! We disciples imitate Jesus. To be like Jesus, we must always be mindful that we are sent by the Father. It's critical for us to see ourselves as being sent. Instead of identifying ourselves as a mailman, foreman, librarian, or housewife, we should imitate Jesus and the apostles by identifying ourselves as being sent by the Lord (see [Jn 10:36](#); [2 Tm 1:1](#); [Ti 1:1](#)).

Jesus tells us: "As the Father has sent Me, so I send you" ([Jn 20:21](#)). At each Mass (a word which means "sent"), we are sent forth to "go and announce the Gospel of the Lord." Thus, we are sent forth by the Lord from Mass to minister to the world what struck me the most in today's scripture passage is that the disciples did exactly what Jesus told them! I am Catholic because St. Thomas the Apostle came to India in AD 52. Remember, you are a catholic because one of the apostles went

to somewhere in the world. And they did proclaim the gospel shedding their blood! It is your turn now!