

Reflection for Ascension Thursday 21st May 2020

This is the Gospel from today's Mass

Matthew 28:16-20

Go and make disciples of all nations

The eleven disciples set out for Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had arranged to meet them. When they saw him they fell down before him, though some hesitated. Jesus came up and spoke to them. He said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.'

Probably most of us have experienced that moment when we have to say goodbye to someone we love, whether it be at the airport, the railway station or ultimately at the hospital bedside. There is always sadness at parting and in all cases we look forward to the time when we shall meet again.

You might think that this was the case at the Ascension of Jesus when he is lifted up and takes his place at the right hand of God. But the very opposite happens as Luke tells us in his gospel, the apostles return to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually blessing God in the Temple. What is the reason for this joy? It is because Jesus has promised to send his Holy Spirit to give them power to carry out his commission, *'Go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptised will be saved, he who does not believe will be condemned.'*

This teaching is serious stuff and gave the apostles the motivation and the grace they needed to do this and we know from the Acts of the Apostles that they went out into Jerusalem and on that very day three thousand souls were converted.

So this is the message from today's great feast of the Ascension of the Lord, not that Jesus went up into heaven but that his followers, in other words us, have been given the task of continuing the saving work of Jesus, he is the head and we are the body.

We also know that where the head has gone the body will surely follow. So as Jesus has returned to his Father in heaven we will follow him, as Jesus came to share in our humanity so we shall share in his divinity. This sharing in the life of Jesus makes us one with him. As St Paul tells us in the letter to the Ephesians, *'Do your best to preserve the unity which the Spirit gives... There is one body and one Spirit, just as there is one hope to which God has called you. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; there is one God and Father of all men, who is Lord of all, works through all and is in all.'*

Jesus said this because of the unity between us and himself, as St Augustine teaches us, for he is our head and we are his body. Do not be tempted to think there are other equally valid ways to God in addition to Jesus, the Way the Truth and the Life. Do not fall into the trap, all too common today, of thinking all religions are more or less the same. Do not be so drawn into the worldly way of thinking that faith doesn't matter in today's world because of this global pandemic has taught us any thing it has taught us that we are not in control and our comfortable existence can easily be disrupted almost overnight. Let us pray to God for an increase in our faith in Our Lord and his teaching. He has told us to observe all the commands he gave us and promised to be with us always; yes to the end of time.

May the Lord bless us and keep us safe and Our Lady protect us.