



ASCENSION OF THE *Lord*

MAY 24, 2020

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father,
and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 28:19

MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS

Today we celebrate the ascension of Jesus into heaven, his departure after the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, and all the appearances to the disciples. Acts and Ephesians look back at the time just before Jesus leaves and then at its immediate aftermath, still trying to understand what has happened and what is expected of those who were left behind. The readings remind us that the disciples are still not certain what all this means to them. But one thing is certain: Jesus is gone and they are struggling with what to do next. Matthew tells us that even as they believed in Jesus, they doubted. Jesus responds to their doubt with a call to work. He tells them to “make disciples of all nations.”

UP, UP AND AWAY

The reading from Acts gives us a pretty complete description of the Ascension. Jesus was lifted up and taken from their sight but not before the disciples ask lots of questions about what will happen. The disciples are still thinking that the kingdom of Israel will be restored. Jesus answers them with a promise of power from the Holy Spirit and a commission that they be witnesses not just to Israel but to the ends of the earth. But the disciples are still thinking small. Jesus knows that the meaning of his death and resurrection is not small. Ephesians offers a glimpse of the great gifts of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. The disciples cannot even imagine what this means for them as they stand staring into the sky. Jesus tells them one more time that their work is to tell everyone about his life and work, to baptize them, and to teach them his commandments.

NEVER CAN SAY GOOD-BYE

The disciples still thought this was just about their life and their world. They are reminded by Jesus that what they have lived through with him, his life, death, and resurrection, is greater and more far-reaching than they can yet imagine. This is not just about the kingdom of Israel. This is about all nations. This is not just about witnessing in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria. This work will take them to the ends of the earth. It is an enormous undertaking that we and the disciples have been given. It seemed impossible to the disciples then and it seems impossible to us now. But it is not. It is possible because we are not alone in this work. Jesus is with us not for a day or a week or even our lifetime. Jesus is with us always, until the end of the age.

TODAY’S READINGS

Acts 1:1–11
Psalm 47:2–3, 6–9
Ephesians 1:17–23
Matthew 28:16–20

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