

Dear Parishioners,

There are a number of details in this weekend's Gospel for the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord that help us shape our interpretation of the passage. "*The eleven disciples went to Galilee.*" Not **twelve**, but **eleven**. Judas is no longer among the company of those who represent the new Israel. This remains a painful reminder that not all of the followers of Jesus are perfect. We doubt. We drag our feet. Maybe we are not as courageous in carrying forth Jesus' saving mission into the world as we might be or should be. Yet, in spite of our weakness, Jesus has still empowered each and every one of us who call ourselves Christian to carry on His ministry. ***His ministry will continue.***

The disciples went to Galilee. Galilee is where Jesus' saving mission began. *Is Galilee where it also ends?* Not really, even if these verses from Saint Matthew's Gospel ... Chapter 28 ... conclude his account. Note that there is no mention of the Ascension in these verses. Saint Matthew ends with the Great Commission to go and baptize: "*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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the close of the age*" (Mt 28:19-20). There is no end to Jesus' being with us because we are to take up His work and carry it – carry Him – forward for all time.

One final detail: Jesus ordered His disciples to a mountain ... a place in Scripture for divine encounter and divine revelation. ***The encounter*** ... Jesus promises to be with them "*until the close of the age.*" His Presence is His farewell gift to the disciples. ***The revelation*** ... they are to take up His saving mission by making "*disciples of all nations*" through baptizing and teaching. The disciples are His farewell gift to the world. And by taking up His saving mission ... so are we.

It takes us a lifetime of following Jesus and proclaiming His Good News to learn how gifted we are and what a gift we are to others. What the disciples hadn't yet come to fully believe was that Jesus would always remain with them, giving them strength ... through the Spirit. There was a startling newness to what Jesus was doing and the message He was conveying. Never before had someone been present with them who "*fills all things in every way*" (Second Reading). Never before had someone so completely shared power. Never before had someone promised the most potent power – the Holy Spirit who is with us "until the end of the age."

The power given Jesus is now handed over to His disciples ... and the new thing about this power is that it is a divine Person ... it is the Holy Spirit who is sent to dwell within us ... it is the Holy Spirit to make us one with divinity. This Spirit given us is the way Jesus remains with us "*always, until the end of the age.*" We have the power to make disciples ... to baptize ... and to teach. We are Jesus' gift to others. But more importantly, we have the power to be the Presence of the Risen Christ through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit ... which is His gift to us. With the Holy Spirit, we can faithfully continue Jesus' ministry. The Holy Spirit transforms us into being gift for others.

We are like the disciples not only in our doubting, but also in that we have been given the power to continue the work of Jesus Christ. In a society in which healthy self-esteem is so difficult for so many people, consider what Jesus does for each and every one of us ... He gives us the power to continue His work and, even more, He remains with us, so we are His Risen Presence for others. How healthy should our self-esteem be! We carry within us the Holy Spirit ... the Risen Presence of Jesus Christ! How urgent our response needs to be. Jesus chooses us to continue His Presence ... to continue to be His saving mission in our world.

May Saint Michael the Archangel defend, guide, protect, and intercede for us always! May you and your families be well and safe on this Ascension Day and always!

~ Fr. Larry