



Things to Ponder

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Feast of the Ascension – Gospel of Mark 16:15-20

Introduction: Go Forth on Your Mission!

This Sunday is the liturgical celebration of the Ascension of the Lord, when Jesus was taken up to heaven on the 40th day after Easter.

This year's Gospel for this solemnity is taken from the Gospel of Mark. It is believed that his Gospel originally ended with verse 8 of chapter 16: "So they (the women) went out and ran from the tomb, distressed and terrified. They said nothing to anyone because they were afraid." (Wouldn't you be also?) This seems to have been regarded as too abrupt an ending—a bit too pessimistic—so brief summaries borrowed from other sources (including Matthew and Luke and the early Church Fathers) were added on – and officially accepted and approved by the Church. (Contemporary Scripture commentaries have noted that if the original ending had been grasped as a description of the women's stunned awe at the realization of Jesus' resurrection, another ending would never have been sought!)

Regardless, our Gospel for this feast is taken from this "Longer Ending" in Mark, which clearly

emphasizes the universal scope of Jesus' mission. "Go into the *whole* world and proclaim the gospel to *every creature*." It's an inclusive mission. There are similarities in the reports of Jesus'

Ascension in the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke. In each case, Jesus assigns his disciples the task of proclaiming the gospel message to the entire world. It's a powerful message of mission! Curiously though, only Mark and Luke actually report Jesus' ascension into heaven – a glorious return to sit "at the right hand of God." (a position of power)

Mark also emphasizes that Jesus' disciples will be able to work wonders – but only with the Lord Jesus working with them. Essentially, they are called to preach, to heal, and drive out evil (unclean spirits).

I would invite you to take time to read and ponder the words from the *Gospel of Mark 16:15-20*.

What word or words caught your attention?

What in this passage comforted you?

What in this passage challenged you?

Did anything in this passage surprise you?

Further Questions and Reflections:

Today is the feast day of the Ascension. As he was leaving his disciples, he gave the “Great Mission” to them: Go into all the world. What is fascinating is that he addressed these solemn words to a small group of followers who had never been particularly impressive witnesses of his teaching. In fact, they even doubted his words and struggled with his Way of life. Yet, he trusted them and promised them the help they needed to carry out this impossible mission. Perhaps the most impressive thing of all is that they did carry out this mission – with boldness and at great risk to themselves! They were on fire.

God is fiercely determined to bring us all into the final community of love, which is gathering day by day. So, Lord Jesus, let me listen to you as you say, “Go!” And let me find creative ways to be good news to those around me.

Name some creative ways you can be a bearer of Jesus’ Good News?

Each of us is called into the ministry of Jesus in some way. We are called to be “other Christs.”

Do you see yourself as “another Christ?”

Jesus, help me to be inclusive in my love. Open my narrow heart to include those who injure me or differ from me in so many ways.

Whom am I not seeing in my day-to-day life?

Several questions to ponder from this Gospel:

When was the last time I shared my faith?

How can people tell that I am a person of faith?

Where is God calling me to go?

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