

*And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all things unto myself.*

We celebrate today the great Feast of Our Blessed Lord's Ascension into heaven, the culmination of his glorious dwelling among men for forty days following his Resurrection. The Resurrection is the crowning truth of our Catholic faith; the Ascension is the exalted truth, the jewels atop the crown as Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father. His Kingdom has been inaugurated. The Apostles and a 2,000-year-old line of Christians have been its witness. To him be glory, honor, dominion and power now and forever, amen!

Christian witness is very difficult today, isn't it? The most basic truths of human life are being re-defined. We live amidst this tug of war of words, a noisy gong of invective in all forms of media, absent of any semblance of the truths that have been man's foundation for generations.

And even in the Church, the institution founded by Christ himself for the express purpose *that all men might come to know the truth* there is an angry challenge to words spoken from the lips of Our Blessed Lord. How are we to heed the call *to preach the Gospel to all nations* when the idea of man, and even Jesus is a moving target?

The Great Apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians exhorted us to *live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit.* Are we? Is the Lord drawing all things to himself?

Imagine yourself as an Apostle in this truly incredible Gospel scene, these final moments of Our Blessed Lord's existence on earth. Three years you witnessed his ministry of teaching, preaching and healing; his gruesome death; locked in a room certain you are next. He rises, appears, walks, eats and breathes on you his peace. He commissions you to *go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to every creature.*

How did the Apostles, and how do we respond to this Great Commissioning? Since he gave us the Holy Spirit he wasn't counting on us doing it alone. *The Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs.*

St. Paul wrote *he ascended on high and gave gifts to men.* The purpose of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and any other gift the Lord gives to us, is for the building up of his body, the Church. Are we employing these gifts for their ordained purpose? Are we discerning the gifts he has given to each of us amidst all the noise of the world?

At the very least are we activating the grace the of Holy Mass, especially ones like this, to empower us to *preach the Gospel to every creature?* If so, how?

Because we are awash in mindless, confusing chatter, and worse, discord and sin! The bond of unity that St. Paul begs of us isn't being preserved, but seemingly blown apart.

It is perhaps time to consider a statement attributed to St. Francis of Assisi: preach the Gospel using words if necessary. There isn't any indication this is what Our Blessed Lord had in mind when he commissioned the Apostles. But we live in a different culture, a time when shouting is more desirable than listening. Discussion and conversation is now about someone pushing an angry agenda.

St. Mark wrote that signs accompanied the work of the Apostles. We, we are the signs of today! A sign is something that conveys a meaning. What signs *follow us that believe?*

The heart of Jesus own preaching and the visible sign of our Christian life is the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes draw us to Jesus, who alone is truth, happiness and the peace of the kingdom of heaven. The life of the Beatitudes-displaying a beatific vision is THE sign that we are drawn to Christ. And it draws others to him too.

St John Chrysostom had these comments on the Beatitudes: "how unambitious he was, and void of boasting. He instructs us to do nothing for display, and to separate ourselves from the tumult of ordinary life". The ordinary of life today is a constant barrage of "I want this" and "you should think this way" and "you can't say that". Christ speaks to all of us on that mountain, reminding us of the ideal Christian life:

*Blessed are the poor in spirit:* seek heavenly things; be detached from the ways of the world.

*Blessed are they who mourn:* lament the loss of spiritual, not temporal goods; lament at your sins and the sins of the world.

*Blessed are the meek:* avoid being impatient and quarrelsome; imitate Christ who is gentle and humble of heart.

*Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness:* desire an increase of all virtues for yourself and others.

*Blessed are the merciful:* Christ freely gives it to us, so freely give it to others.

*Blessed are the pure of heart:* free yourself from all selfish desires and seek only God's will.

*Blessed are the peacemakers:* cultivate Christ's peace in your soul; among friends, neighbors and especially with those whom we disagree.

*Blessed are those who are persecuted for justice sake:* patiently bear those trials that come from trying to live a life worthy of being called Christian.

*Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account: imitate the life of Christ and propagate it.*

*Rejoice and be glad, your reward will be great in heaven, where, lifted up, Christ will draw all things completely to himself.*

My Brothers and Sisters, Christ has ascended into heaven. He is seated at the right hand of the Father. His Messianic Kingdom has been inaugurated. The Kingdom of God is here, it is in you.

Go, preach the Gospel to every creature.