

## **Action, Not Answers**

Ascension of the Lord (Year B)

May 16, 2021

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On this feast of the Ascension, we may be a little upset with Jesus for leaving us. As we were told in the First Reading from the *Acts of the Apostles*, as he was talking with his followers about taking the Good News to the ends of the earth, he was mysteriously lifted up in a cloud to heaven and disappeared from their sight. Why would he give his followers such an important task and then disappear? Why wouldn't he stay with us so that he could give us all the answers to the questions of life?

As a Church, we need to be honest about today's feast. Jesus Christ is no longer physically with us. We cannot directly ask him certain questions and get all the answers we need. Furthermore, we cannot just say that whatever the Church says is what Jesus says. That would unfairly put words in his mouth, as there are some issues that he never addressed. So why did he leave us?

Simply put, Jesus left us so that we could get to work. In today's Gospel, he says, 'go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature...drive out demons, speak new languages, and lay hands on the sick.' If Jesus were still with us, we would probably keep shifting the responsibility back onto him and not do our part. But he wants it to be our responsibility. He wants the Church to take more initiative. He wants us to act.

Even when we are not a Church of answers, we can still be a Church of action. As the Christian writer Brian McLaren notes, Christianity is currently undergoing a spiritual migration ‘from a system of beliefs to a way of life.’ He sees this as a good thing. He writes, “for billions of people, for Christianity to be Christian, only one thing matters: correct beliefs.” Trying to show the absurdity of that, he continues, “we might conclude that Jesus said, ‘by their beliefs you shall know them,’ or ‘this is my command, that you believe right doctrines,’ or ‘behold, a new systematic theology I give unto you.’ (*The Great Spiritual Migration*, 19) Of course, none of these are Jesus’ sayings. Jesus was more concerned with love, action, and getting to work. Action, yes; answers, not always.

After we accept the responsibility of being a church of action, the paradox is that Jesus does indeed come to help us. If we read today’s Gospel carefully, after Jesus left this earth, it says that the disciples went out “and the Lord worked with them.”

*The Ascension teaches us that Jesus will not do our work for us, but he will continue to work with us.*

Can I hear the difference between those two phrases?

Like the men of Galilee, let us not just stand looking up at the sky. Instead, let us look around us to the ends of the earth.