

FROM FR. CHRIS ALIMAJI'S DESK

Reflections on the Ascension of the Lord

The Ascension of the Lord, in our area replaces the Seventh Sunday of Easter, Year B. Our Bible Readings are Acts 1:1-11; Ephesians 1:17-23; Mark 16:15-20; and Song of Praise, Psalm 47. Some Solemnities are always celebrated as Holy Days of Obligation. The Ascension of the Lord is one of them. **The Church in her benevolence has mitigated the sins previously attached to Holy Days of Obligation and turned them into days of grace, in the dioceses and regions that moved it to Sundays. In this way, what St. Paul said becomes manifest that “where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more” (Rom. 5:20).** Instead of many Catholics committing mortal sin by not attending Mass on a Holy Day of Obligation, they are showered with grace. I want to believe that we as Catholics understand the graciousness of the Church of Christ when He said: “Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, etc. etc.” (**Mt. 16:19; John 20:21-23**). This authority is exercised here. I hope we do not abuse this moment of grace but try to attend Sunday Mass and participate in the solemnities.

Before the Ascension, the Lord Jesus said to his disciples as St. John wrote: “I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth.” (**John 16:12**). In St. Luke’s second account of the mission of Christ on earth, known as the Acts of the Apostles, we read the testimony of the Resurrection, regarding the Lord’s appearances for forty days, (cf. **Acts 1:1-11**). It becomes obvious for any doubting Thomas that the resurrection was real and in truth. Let us focus here on the Promise of the Holy Spirit and the Commissioning of the disciples in both the First reading and the Gospel, (cf. Mk 16:15-20). **The Holy Spirit is the power we must wait for and pray for before we can truly witness as the disciples of Christ.** I am reminded of the song: “You shall be my witnesses unto the ends of the earth, witnessing to my truth and to my love.” What followed in the two passages is the account of the Ascension of Christ into heaven before many witnesses.

The Greeks asked for signs, while the Jews looked for miracles. The Lord Jesus said that the miracle is his death, burial and resurrection after three days in the belly of the earth. That has been fulfilled in the past forty days of the resurrection. He has ascended to heaven where he came from. **The disciples after leaving the Mount of Ascension, went to the Upper Room to pray for Power which Jesus promised. Those prayers are now called “Novena to the Holy Spirit” or “Pentecost Novena.” Are there some of us Christians still “looking at the sky” since their baptism but have not yet engaged themselves in the Holy Spirit Novena?** They have not asked for power yet. They are still on the hill, while the disciples came down from the hill and went in to pray earnestly for Baptism with the Holy Spirit. Are you one of them? Come down! Begin to seek power from above for discipleship ministries. Every year we hold Pentecost Novena in our church for those nine days leading to the Pentecost. The Apostles taught us how to hold novena.

There was a time in some of my previous parishes we had leadership training period on Small Christian Communities. Those that passed through the formation became their future leaders. Some folks only realized the importance after I left their parishes. They then asked my successor to invite me to repeat the training but failed. They had to come over to my new parish

for training. **The lesson of the story is not to wait until it is too late. The Lord talked about people not realizing the moment of their visitation. Time waits for nobody, they say.**

In our Second Reading, Eph. 1:17-23, we read the wonderful prayer St. Paul said for the Ephesians that they may receive the Holy Spirit. Review it and understand the meaning of the power of the Holy Spirit. **Some Christians are functioning outside the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They are functioning for the wrong purpose and towards the wrong direction and with wrong intentions.** Is there not a saying that “not all that glitters are gold”? Just because something seems nice to you does not make it right. Ask the Holy Spirit for guidance.

Concluding this reflection, I want to highlight here that **the moment has come for Christianity to claim her rightful place. The Lord Jesus came to establish a new religion. He has done so and has ascended back to where he was before.** In Mark’s gospel today, (Mk. 16:15-20), we have the command of Christ to his Church. “Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned.” (Mk. 16:15-16). It cannot be any clearer. The Bible calls it the Commissioning of the Eleven. Note the importance of baptism for salvation. Catechism taught us that clearly. This writer dwelt also on one of our Christian doctrines. **Jesus after commissioning the disciples ascended to the Father and sat on the throne of glory. To sit at the right hand is to be given the highest place of honor. Figuratively, he wore the crown of victory. We have it in our Creed. Biblically proven too!** The Church is commissioned for world mission, world evangelization to the ends of the earth. Preaching and proclaiming the gospel of Christ are the essence of evangelization, of ordination, of sending out missionaries for Christ. Conversion to the Faith and baptism of believers are the fruits of evangelization. Not to believe after hearing the gospel is self-condemnation. We do not go about seeking for miracles; rather miracles occur by God’s providence. They are not signs of holiness of the preacher but God’s way of affirmation of the message when necessary. Therefore, do not dwell on seeking for miracles in order to authenticate ministries all the time. But if you have the eyes of your minds enlightened by the Holy Spirit you will witness many miracles and signs on regular basis. Miracles do happen!