



BIBLE STUDY FEAST OF THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD YEAR A

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“...why are you standing there looking at the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven.” Acts 1:11

Reading I: Acts 1:1-11

DON'T JUST STAND THERE, DO SOMETHING! In 2011, the Pope Benedict XVI inaugurated what is called New Evangelization. The New Evangelization calls each of us to deepen our faith, believe in the Gospel message and go forth to proclaim the Gospel. It calls all Catholics to galvanize their knowledge of the Gospel of Jesus and then go forth to evangelize. The New Evangelization is focused on offering revitalizing the Gospel within those who have experienced a crisis of faith. The need to emphasize evangelization was dramatized by the 2008 Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) study, *"Sacraments Today: Belief and Practice Among U.S. Catholics"*. The study revealed that only 23% of U.S. Catholics regularly attend Mass once a week, while 77% self-identify as proud to be Catholic. Evangelization therefore, is the exercise of the duty of baptized Catholics to live and teach our faith.



Don't Just Stand There!

Luke begins The Book of Acts the same way he began his gospel with a nod to his patron Theophilus. Acts tells how Jesus' disciples received his Holy Spirit and continued His work after he ascended into heaven. It could be considered a travelogue of evangelists spreading the Gospel. Luke stresses that Jesus appeared several times to His apostles during the "forty days" after the resurrection and gave them new insights. Complete insight and power would come at Pentecost. Baptism with the Holy Spirit is the way God's power is given to humans. Jesus' ascension to heaven in verses 6-11 recalls 2 Kings 2:4-15, where Elisha was promised double portions of the Holy Spirit if he saw Elijah taken to heaven. The disciples saw Jesus taken up and received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. They could no longer just stand there looking to the sky. They had to do something. DISCUSSION QUESTION: Are you equipped to evangelize others? If not, what do you need?

WHAT IS AN EVANGELIST?

EVANGELIST (e-van'-jel-ist): This is a form of the word ordinarily translated "gospel" (εὐαγγέλιον), except that here it designates one who announces that gospel to others (εὐαγγελιστες, "a bringer of good tidings"), literally. God Himself is an evangelist, for He "preached the gospel beforehand unto Abraham" (Gal 3:8); Jesus Christ was an evangelist, for He also "preached the gospel" (Luke 20:1); Paul was an evangelist as well as an apostle (Rom 1:15); Philip the deacon was an evangelist (Acts 21:8); and Timothy, the pastor (2 Tim 4:5); and indeed all the early disciples who, on being driven out of Jerusalem, "went everywhere preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). (From International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Electronic Database Copyright © 1996, 2003, 2006 by BibleSoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

Reading II: Ephesians 1:17-23

DON'T JUST STAND THERE, DO SOMETHING! St. Paul prays that God would give the Ephesians Christians deeper insight in to His mercy and love through the gifts of wisdom and revelation. The wisdom he references here is the ability to judge correctly and to follow the best course of action, based on knowledge and understanding. In order to evangelize others, the Ephesians should understand the true value of the faith to which they had been called (v. 17-18). They were baptized as Christians into the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He encouraged the Ephesians and us as well, when he declared the cross is foolishness to the Greeks and a stumbling block to the Jews. But to those who believe, said St. Paul, this "foolishness of God" is "the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:18-25).

The revelation he prays for the Ephesians is that God will *communicate Himself* concerning His moral standards and His plan of salvation. St. Paul prays that the "eyes of their hearts" (vv. 18-23) may be opened to the richness of God's salvation plan for them. Part of that revelation is that God created all things new in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (v. 23). This is the good news that must be told to the world. DISCUSSION QUESTION: How does this prayer for the Ephesians apply to you?

Gospel: Matthew 28:16-20

DON'T JUST STAND THERE, DO

SOMETHING! St. Pope John Paul II, in *Redemptoris Missio*, his 1990 encyclical announcing a New Evangelization said, "No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church, can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples." To be sure, evangelization is not something to do occasionally or even most of the time. It is something that we must do all of the time. It is the identity of the church. It is the purpose of the Church. Faith is only worth having when we give it away. That is why we Christians who believe and have been baptized into the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, cannot wait for others to spread the Gospel. We must spread the gospel ourselves.

These verses from the Gospel of Matthew should be contrasted with the first reading as a continuation of the formation of the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit. The event described in verses 16-20 is said to have occurred some days after the resurrection. The eleven who saw Jesus worshipped Him. The word "doubted" could be translated as "hesitated" and suggests that the apostles had some unresolved questions about how they should respond to Him (see also 14:31). These details are similar to accounts of Jesus' appearances in the Gospels of Luke and John. There is doubt, reverence for Jesus and a commission.

Matthew stresses the authority of Jesus in his Gospel (see 7:29; 10:1, 7-8; 11:27; 22:43-44; 24:35). For him, the place for revelation is on a mountain. (See Matt 5:1) Perhaps this validates the commission that would follow. The word "Go" in the commission implies physical and mental movement (v. 19). The response to the command requires physical, mental and spiritual preparation. This will be accomplished by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). The disciples should go and make disciples because Jesus has universal authority (see the second reading). He gave them a new universal mission in keeping with His new worldwide authority. Previously, He had limited their work to Israel (10:1-8; cf. 15:24). Now, He sends them into the entire world. The Trinitarian Baptism is perhaps the formula used in the Matthean Community that replaced an earlier custom of baptizing in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:38). The final verse, "I am with you," echoes the beginning of the Gospel 1:23, "He shall be called Emmanuel". With God with us, we cannot just stand still. We must spread the Gospel. Don't just stand there! Do something! **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** How will you spread the Gospel to all nations?

PRAY ABOUT IT!

Monday

Give a word of encouragement to someone today.

Tuesday

Know your mission. Read and memorize Mat. 28:19-20.

Wednesday

Offer your services to a ministry in the parish.

Thursday

Pray for our civic authorities.

Friday

Attend mass and receive the Eucharist.

The Baptism of Infants

1250 Born with a fallen human nature and tainted by original sin, children also have need of the new birth in Baptism to be freed from the power of darkness and brought into the realm of the freedom of the children of God, to which all men are called. The sheer gratuitousness of the grace of salvation is particularly manifest in infant Baptism. The Church and the parents would deny a child the priceless grace of becoming a child of God were they not to confer Baptism shortly after birth.

1251 Christian parents will recognize that this practice also accords with their role as nurturers of the life that God has entrusted to them.

(Source: The Catechism of the Catholic Church)

Resources: *The Gospel According to Matthew, Introduction to the New Testament*, Raymond E. Brown S.S. Doubleday New York, Ny. Pp202-203
 Acts of the Apostles, William S. Kurtz, S. J. ; Collegeville Bible Commentary, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville Minn., p. 1036-1037;
Living Liturgy Spirituality, Celebration, and Catechesis for Sundays and Solemnities Year A 2014, Joyce Zimmerman, C. PP. S. Kathleen Harmon, S.ND. de N., Christopher W. Canlon, S. M. Liturgical Press Collegeville, Mn. pp. 137-140; Scripture texts in this work are taken from the *New American Bible, revised edition* © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C. and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All Rights Reserved. No part of the New American Bible may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner. The Sunday Readings Cycle A, Kevin O' Sullivan, O.F.M Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago, 188-195; <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catechism;>

This meditation is prepared by Deacon Terrel J. Broussard for personal use in Adult Faith Formation at St. Peter Claver and St Maria Goretti Parishes in New Orleans, La. ©2017