

On a normal weekend, we should be able to find a relationship between the first reading and the Gospel. But today, we actually hear two **separate** accounts of the same event. In our first reading we hear St. Luke's account of the Ascension ... from Acts ... and our Gospel is St. Matthew's version.

Now ... in St. Luke's **Gospel** ... you **could** easily get the notion that the Resurrection, appearance on the road to Emmaus, the appearance to the apostles in the upper room ... **and** ... the Ascension ... all occurred ... on one very **busy** day. But in our first reading ... St. Luke clarifies that this is definitely **not** the case. For forty days ... after Easter, He appeared to His Apostles, instructed them and commissioned them ... to be His "**witnesses** ... to the ends of the earth" ... to "go ... and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that He had commanded. ... And ... lest you think this sacred commission ... was meant **just** for the apostles ... some ... one-time past event frozen back in history ... **please** ... think again! No! ... This was indeed a commission to His apostles ... but through those apostles also ... to the church ... to **us** ... not just the clergy ... not just religious ... but **all** of us.

But first ... the apostles were to wait ... for the fulfillment of "the promise of the Father" ... the coming of the Holy Spirit ... the paraclete ... the advocate ... that would complete their preparation and bring them the spiritual power and the charisms they would need to **fulfill** this sacred commission. Then ...when He had completed their preparation ... He would ascend ... promising that He would return.

He didn't have to ascend. He could have remained right here on earth and tended to the building of the Kingdom, Himself. It would have been done right ... It would have been done perfectly ... There would have been no mistakes. But instead ... He trusted the building of the Kingdom ... first to the Apostles ... then to their successors ... and finally to the rest of us. He did this fully aware of our very human imperfections.

Jesus was ready to ascend to His Father. His mission of example, teaching, salvation, and redemption had been accomplished. He had prepared His apostles and now ... the

time was right. They still don't completely get it. And they're still feeling a bit lost and unsure. They're working hard ... at trying to comprehend all that Jesus said and did ... but all this is a lot to take in! And ... there is still one task yet to be accomplished to make these apostles into what they need to be. He promises to send the Holy Spirit! Pentecost is just around the corner. And Pentecost will change everything ... for them ... and for us! Their faith and courage were not yet what they **would** be after the Holy Spirit would descend upon them but they had learned by now that ... Jesus ... was dependable ... that He could be trusted! So now ... when He also gives them this promise: "... behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age." They trust Him! Of course ... they didn't know how all this would come about so they gathered together in the upper room and waited. We will hear next weekend about the **fulfillment** ... of that promise.

But for a few days ... we're not sure how many ... this promise ... is really all they had to hold onto. It was enough! ... I am with you always, until the end of the age. Think about that just a bit because trust in this promise is the **essence** of our faith. What would our faith be ... what **could** our faith be ... without trust in this promise?

This task that He left us can seem daunting ... but He did not and does not leave us to our own devices ... He does not ask us to go into battle unarmed as it were. He is with us, of course, in the Eucharist, in His Sacred Word, in and through all the Sacraments. He is with us and when we pray. He is with us as Church ... the people of God ... the Mystical Body of Christ. He is the Head. We are the Body.

But ... part and parcel to our Human condition is our lack of perfection. We are weak. We succumb to temptation. We make bad decisions. Our most dependable human trait is that ... sooner or later we will disappoint ... our God ... our families ... those we are responsible to ... those we are responsible for ... perhaps especially ... we disappoint ourselves. And when we disappoint ourselves ... or others ... or when others disappoint us ... we suffer ... and ... because He is with us as Church ... as He promised ... He not only is our consolation but He suffers with us. And when it seems like there is no news but bad news and His promise is all we have to hang onto ... we don't have to look up at the skies for Jesus! He is right here ... with us. And **that** ... is all we need!

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