

SERMON FOR THE FESTIVAL OF THE ASCENSION

MAY 21, 2020

TEXT: ACTS 1: 8-9;EPHESIANS 1: 23

THEME: MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” **9** And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

22 And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, **23** which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

In the name of the Risen and Ascended Christ,

There are four major festivals that we celebrate in the Church year. You know well the names of three of them: Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. The fourth Festival is the forgotten festival, it is the Festival of the Ascension, where Jesus visibly ascended into heaven and as we confess in the Apostles’ Creed; “He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father.” It is just as important a festival for us to celebrate in the Church, but it is forgotten probably because it falls on a Thursday, forty days after Easter. While the secular world will pay attention to Christmas and Easter, for different reasons than we Christians do, Ascension Day just doesn’t get the attention in the Christian Church.. The Ascension is no less important than these other

festivals, it is the day we celebrate when Jesus essentially accomplished His mission here on earth and has now taken back His place in heaven. A helpful way to think about the Ascension is to liken it to a welcome home celebration in heaven for Jesus, where the angels rejoice as everything that needed to transpire for our salvation has taken place. It is Jesus' victory day where He says: "Mission Accomplished."

We all know about celebrations of events where a mission has been accomplished. At the end of WWII the people of America threw all sorts of parades as the soldiers returned home from battle, the parades were a form of saying "Mission Accomplished."

The city of New York is well known for throwing a unique type of parade, called a ticker tape parade. As the heroes parade through the city streets in open air vehicles, streamers, confetti, and ticker tape rain down from heaven to celebrate a triumphant return. Mission Accomplished.

When Ohio State wins a national championship in football, the whole state celebrates, may not with a parade, but with a gathering in the Horseshoe. The team goal has been met, a sense of "Mission Accomplished." Families who have loved ones graduating from high school, college, and graduate school will

hold celebrations for their graduates, a way of noting this significant achievement and saying to everyone: "Mission Accomplished."

The Father sent His Son Jesus on a divine mission, a mission to save sinners. In love the Father saw humanity in its lost state, mired in sin and separated from Him. For each of us were born dead in transgression and sin, we were born alienated from God, by nature children of wrath. But God, rich in mercy, sent His Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but to save it through Him. This Mission to save the world meant that God would send His Son Jesus, born of the Virgin, to keep the Law perfectly in your place and mine. He would live as every human would live, yet without sin. Jesus did nothing in His earthly life out of selfish ambition, but He humbled Himself. He became obedient to the point of death, dying on the cross. The One who knew no sin became sin for all of us. He came to live in this world and to save the world but the world He created rejected Him.

He was despised by men, forsaken by man and also by His Father. Jesus was crucified on the cross, damned for the sins of all, drinking from the cup of wrath from the Father.

Jesus did all of this because it was His will, His mission in life, to do the will of the Father, for God wants everyone to be saved. Once Jesus

accomplished His mission, of living, dying, and rising again, Jesus gathered His disciples on the mountain near Bethany. There, Jesus lifted up His hands and blessed them saying: “ you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” **9** And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.” Jesus returned to heaven, to His rightful place at the right hand of the Father. Mission Accomplished! And at His Ascension the Father, in the words of the Apostle Paul: “ put all things under His(Jesus) feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, **23** which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”

Now Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father, but this doesn't mean that Jesus is in any way physically restricted. Even though we can't see Jesus physically it doesn't mean that He is not with us. He is! He is present, and it is because of His ascension that Jesus as the true God-Man uses His God power at all times for our benefit. Hence, when Jesus says that He is with you always He really is, for He now fills everything in every way. He is able to keep His promise of never leaving or forsaking you, of being your ever present Help in times of trouble, for He now uses His power as Gods' Son to bless you.

Jesus is present, here and now. He says that where two or three are gathered in My Name I am there in the midst of them. He is here as He speaks to you in His word. He offers to you His very own Body and Blood in, with, and under the bread and wine in the Sacrament for your forgiveness, help, and salvation. Jesus is present with you where His Word and Sacraments are administered.

Now that Jesus has accomplished the Father's mission of saving the world from sin, Satan, and death, Jesus calls you to share in His mission to share that Good News in the world today. This is why Jesus told His disciples: "All authority has been given to me, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you and know that I am with you always, even until the end of time." (Matthew 28:18-20). Jesus' mission has now become your mission and my mission, a mission to seek and save those who are lost, those who do not know Jesus and His love.

As human beings we will spend a great deal of time and effort to find something that we value, that we have lost. I know personally that I have spent countless hours looking for my lost phone, my glasses, or a book that I

have misplaced. If you have driven around town you no doubtedly have seen signs of pet owners seeking help in finding lost pets.

God sends us out now on a mission to seek lost souls. Sadly, we won't go to the same effort to find the lost as we do with our own lost possessions. Our effort might have been lax because we have had a fear of rejection, or we have been at a loss for words, perhaps we just haven't been attuned to the opportunities that God has presented to us.

But now, in this time that we live in, we have new opportunities to share the Good News of Jesus with others. God places people in our midst, even during this pandemic, who are open to hearing God's Good News of Jesus and are in need of knowing that God loves them. People who are out of work and wondering how they are going to make it. People who are afraid of the present and the future and don't know where to turn. God presents opportunities to you and me to witness to others what God has done and to offer hope of what God can and will do. For God sent His Son into the world not to condemn the world but to save the world through Him.

God has saved you because others have witnessed to you. It might have been a parent, a grandparent, a friend, an invitation to church, or an act of kindness from a stranger. Just as someone has witnessed to you, telling you

about Jesus, now you have opportunities galore to tell others about Jesus. God places people in your path that you can pray with and for, that you can invite to church, that you can listen to as they share what concerns them most. God has given to you a mission to be a witness to others. The Ascension proves that Jesus has accomplished His mission to be the Savior for all. And our Ascended Lord reminds each of us that His mission now has become our mission, to share the love of Christ with all. Jesus rules the world and His Church in love, and even now He loves you dearly. And you can know for certain that He who kept His promises still keeps His promises, that He is with you always, even He comes again in glory.

Amen