

Ascension 2018 “Proclaim the Gospel”

Fr. Frank Schuster

My friends, Jesus tells his disciples, "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature!" Notice that Jesus doesn't tell the disciples to sit around and watch Netflix all day. No couch potatoes here. Jesus tells the disciples to get moving, to go into the whole world and to proclaim the gospel to every creature prior to his ascending into heaven. And could the disciples have imagined that two thousand years later a new parish would be built in a place called Woodinville across an ocean and on the other side of a continent that they didn't even know existed? It is beautiful when you stop to think about it. I love this feast day of the Ascension because you and I have been called to continue the mission of evangelization given to the disciples today by our words, deeds, and manner of life.

And what a strange and wonderful Gospel reading! Jesus tells his disciples that certain signs will accompany them as they go throughout the world to evangelize, including the gift to drive out demons and to speak new languages. Disciples will be able to pick up serpents and to drink poison without being harmed. They will be able to lay hands on the sick and they will recover. What are we to do with Jesus' sayings here? How are we to understand these words?

To begin with, I think Jesus is clearly not promising his disciples that their lives are going to be easy! We are given the sobering reminder this weekend that discipleship is not about going through life with rose-colored glasses, refusing to recognize that at times we will have to face demons, serpents, infirmity, poison and incomprehension. You see, Jesus is reminding us today that the mark of a disciple is not whether or not life will throw a snake at us or two, because life always does. Discipleship is demonstrated by how we keep the faith as a follower of Jesus in good times and in bad. As you know, life is full of challenges. How a person deals with these challenges is what separates a real disciple of Jesus from others who aren't quite there yet.

My friends, on the feast day of the Ascension we are reminded that we have been called to continue the Apostle's mission to go out into the world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature. Or as Saint John Paul II told us in his papacy over and over again to not be afraid to proclaim the Gospel from the rooftops. And this calling isn't easy. We are invited this week to think about the greatest obstacles we are facing right now that are keeping us from proclaiming the Gospel to the people around us like we should by the example of our lives. We are called to name the demonic forces in our life and to name the proverbial serpents that block our path. What are the infirmities or poisons or addictions that are crippling us? Where is communication breaking down, requiring us to learn new vocabulary...sometimes with the very people we live with and love? This Gospel reading can be a powerful examination of conscience, don't you think?

Whether we are a disciple of Jesus or not, we will face these challenges, we will. Life does that. True disciples of Jesus however, will not be poisoned by the hurtful words of others. We will not be dominated by demonic influences in popular culture, we will not give in to despair in the face of grave infirmity, and we will not give up on the people in our life when

conversations break down. And meanwhile, instead of running from the proverbial snakes that symbolize life's scary challenges, through grace we will have the courage to face our greatest fears and get a handle on them.

You see, as we celebrate Jesus' ascension into heaven, we celebrate Jesus' victory over this world as he takes his place at the right hand of the Father. We also celebrate however that Jesus ascended into heaven with his human nature intact. This means, where Jesus goes we can follow. This is accomplished by being a disciple of Jesus who sends us into the world to proclaim the Gospel to every creature by our words, deeds, and manner of life.

And so, we can ask ourselves, who are the people we need to be Christ to this week? If we have an answer to that question, it is time to make a plan because we have been given a profound blessing, mission and responsibility. You see, when Jesus ascends into heaven with his humanity intact, this is a profound statement of what you and I are capable of with God's help. We are capable of ascending into heaven. We are capable of defying the gravity of this world and the forces that spiritually weigh us down if we only conform our hearts to Jesus who is the way, the truth and the life.