

The Ascension of the Lord “Where He Goes, We Hope to Follow”

Bishop Frank Schuster

Does your company or place of employment have a mission statement and a vision statement? For a long time, I had a hard time in my head trying to discern the difference between the two because mission and vision statements sound similar. It has been explained to me that vision statements are where you want to go. Mission statements are how you get there. A lot of companies have mission statements, some of them are better than others. However, I have found that most of the time they are essentially marketing vehicles to sell a product. For example, Facebook’s mission statement essentially speaks about connecting people so that they can share in each other’s lives more fully when in fact, in all honesty, its mission is to learn as much about you as possible so to sell that information and make money. That isn’t a criticism of Facebook. It is a business after all. Why shouldn’t their vision be about making money? That is what businesses do. It is just an example of how a lot of mission statements are not very transparent.

About fifteen-twenty years ago, parishes in the archdiocese were encouraged to adopt a mission statement and a vision statement. This can be a very good thing. It can help parishioners focus on where the parish is at, who they hope to be, and where they want to be as a community in five years or so. However, I mention all of this because this weekend we celebrate the Ascension of the Lord. I sincerely love this solemnity because Jesus articulates clearly what our mission and vision should be as Church. The mission of the Church is to “Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel”. What is the vision of the Church? The Beatific Vision and eternal life with God. Where he goes, we hope to follow.

However, mission statements and vision statements don’t only have to apply to organizations. The vision of our salvation and eternal life with God requires a Church filled with what Pope Francis calls missionary disciples who by their baptism proclaim the Gospel outside of these doors, not just inside. We tend to over complicate matters with all the things that we think are important in life. It is good to remember that Jesus only wants us to focus on two things that are essential to the mission, namely, loving God and loving our neighbor. Loving God requires loving our neighbor enough to proclaim the Gospel with our lives at home, out in the community, but also to that person you see in the mirror each morning. Loving God and loving neighbor is impossible unless you also love yourself enough to truly believe in your heart that the Gospel Jesus entrusts to us is also for you. Jesus’ Gospel is for you because God in fact loves you. Believe it. How hard it is to accept that love! Sin gets in the way. And yet, once received, that love is transformative and meant to be shared, especially with the most vulnerable in our world.

We can therefore ask ourselves this week: having heard Jesus’ expectation that we go into the world and proclaim the Gospel, what does that mean concretely for you? If you were to develop a personal mission statement, what would it be? I think this kind of reflection can be spiritually beneficial because we know what the vision Jesus has for each one of us. He desires our salvation and that we have eternal joy. Where he goes, we hope to follow. The question worthy of reflection becomes: what should I be honestly doing right now with my life to make that journey?