

Ascension
5/21/2023

GO, MAKE DISCIPLES, BAPTIZE, TEACH

It was December 18 last year, the fourth Sunday of Advent. We listened to the first chapter of Matthew's gospel and the annunciation to St. Joseph. The angel quoting Isaiah says, *they shall name him Emmanuel which means "God is with us."* Interestingly enough, throughout the gospel, Jesus is never called Emmanuel. And today we hear from the 28th and final chapter of Matthew's gospel, the conclusion.

It says they worshiped and then Jesus approaches them saying that all authority in heaven and earth has been given to him. These two verses reveal to us that he's truly God but he concludes saying, *I am with you always*. In other words, he is Emmanuel, God with us.

Jesus also gives four commands: go, make disciples, baptize and teach.

Go—Jesus doesn't want the apostles to stay on a mountain top but to go forth. He sends them. The word apostle means one who is sent.

Make disciples—They are to share the good news, tell others about Jesus, they are to evangelize. And Jesus doesn't limit to whom they are to share this message. *Make disciples of all nations...*not just some nations but *all* nations. Everyone is to be invited to the kingdom of God, to be invited to the feast. Not all will accept the invitation but all are to be invited. This mission to make disciples is universal, it's a catholic vision as the word, *catholic*, literally means universal. Just as on the cross Jesus stretched out his arms to embrace all the world, so we are called to do. The apostles are also disciples who are sent to make more disciples. The remaining two commands explore *how* they are to make disciples.

The first is to baptize. Baptism is essential to the Christian life. It's the gateway to life in the Spirit. We're baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, in the name of God, one in three and three in one. In baptism, we share in the dying and rising of Jesus, sin is forgiven and we are brought into relationship with the Trinity.

Baptism isn't optional. Baptism isn't merely something nice. To baptize and to be baptized is to fulfill what Jesus commands. And then after that to continue to grow and deepen in the new life that flows from baptism. And baptism doesn't just confirm what may have happened, it brings about sharing in divine life and it changes us. A baptized person is different from someone who isn't. But there's more.

The second is to teach. Jesus gives the command to teach others, and then he gets more specific, to teach them to observe all that he has commanded. No matter what our profession, we all teach or for that matter, fail to teach Christ, by our example and by our words. To teach here means to share the gospel and it calls us to be faithful to what Jesus has taught us.

Go, make disciples, baptize and teach. Jesus gives this mission to the apostles and he gives this mission to the Church. The Church is apostolic as we profess every Sunday, which is to say that we are connected to the apostles. Pope Francis speaks of us all being missionary disciples. We're all called to be disciples, to follow Jesus but we're all on mission, we're sent in one way or another.

I'm here at St. Therese because I have been sent here by my bishop and someday he will mission me somewhere else. Each of us has our own mission in life to fulfill each in our own way but each as a missionary disciple of Jesus.

Single people and the widowed often have more time to pray for others and be of service to others. Husbands and wives are missioned to minister to each other. Parents are missionaries but in a different sense. They aren't sent somewhere but rather their mission, their children, are sent to them to make disciples of them, to have them baptized and to teach them. All of us in our circumstances of daily life are called to share in the gospel, not by standing on a soapbox but by living and our lives faithfully, by letting the light of Christ shine through us. By sharing with others the gifts of discipleship and baptism that we have all received.

If we are to teach others that means first we must be learners. God gives us a mind for us to use. He gives us an intellect so that we can learn more about him and hopefully love him and our neighbor more and better every day. Think about how much time you spend on Facebook, or other social media or sitting down in front of the television. What if we spent a small portion of that time every day reading the Bible or in prayer or in other good spiritual reading.

To believe in what Jesus teaches isn't just a duty but a privilege and to share the gospel, isn't just a duty but a privilege. –Simply put, the love of God that we have received we are to share with others. The Ascension marks the conclusion of Jesus' earthly ministry. He now entrusts that work to his faithful people, to his Church. God is love. God loves us and God desires our love. And he desires that we share his love.

And we don't do any of this by ourselves. We remember those words of Jesus, *I am with you always*. Jesus disappears from the apostles but remains with them and with us. Jesus remains present when we gather in his name and through those who minister in his name. He's present in his word, in our neighbor, particularly those in need. He's present in sacraments and in a very special way through the Eucharist where he continues to be Emmanuel, where he continues to give himself to us and to nourish with himself under the form of bread and wine. In the Eucharist, Jesus isn't just God with us but rather, he becomes God within us.

We don't journey alone. We don't live life alone. Jesus who is Emmanuel remains present with us; in good times and bad, in joy and sorrow and in so many other circumstances. With lives of intentional faith may we go forth, make disciples, lead them to baptism and teach them all that he has commanded us. Where do we find strength to do all this? Come back next week and find out.