

## MAY 13, 2018 - THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD

### The Ascension of the Lord

Reading 1 [ACTS 1:1-11](#)

Responsorial Psalm [PS 47:2-3, 6-7, 8-9](#)

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R. (6) God mounts his throne to shouts of joy: a blare of trumpets for the Lord.

Reading 2 [EPH 4:1-13 OR 4:1-7, 11-13](#)

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Gospel [MK 16:15-20](#)

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Jesus said to his disciples:

“Go into the whole world  
and proclaim the gospel to every creature.  
Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved;  
whoever does not believe will be condemned.  
These signs will accompany those who believe:  
in my name they will drive out demons,  
they will speak new languages.  
They will pick up serpents with their hands,  
and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not harm them.  
They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.”  
So then the Lord Jesus, after he spoke to them,  
was taken up into heaven  
and took his seat at the right hand of God.  
But they went forth and preached everywhere,  
while the Lord worked with them  
and confirmed the word through accompanying signs.

### HOMILY:

It must have been around the year 2000 that my mother and I went to Mass at the church in where I received First Communion and where I was Confirmed, St. Joseph Church in Howell MI. It would be the same church where almost two years ago we celebrated the funeral Mass for her. After Mass, a woman about the same age as mom came up and introduced herself as “Mrs. Zemaitis,” which was like a lightening bolt from the past—this was my former cub scout leader! Mom had an occasional contact with Mrs. Zemaitis, since they both attended St. Joseph. Mom had told me, “Mrs. Zemaitis would like to say hello if we ever get the chance.” In addition to her being my cub scout leader, I was also a boyhood friend with her son Jimmy. Well, after exchanging joyful greetings with the woman I hadn’t seen in over 25 years, she said playfully, “Yes, I was anxious to see with my own eyes Fr. Scott Bullock. You were about the last one I thought would become a priest!” You see, Jimmy and I were not strangers to mischief and the need for disciplinary action. As to our major crimes, I’m hesitant to give details which might give our youth some ideas. However, I’m sure Mrs. Zemaitis’ doubts about my future holiness were well-founded! Well, as it turned out, Scott did become a priest and, according to Mrs. Zemaitis, my partner in crime Jimmy had become a happy father and husband. Thus, proof-positive that miracles still happen.

Looking back, I do consider it a miracle, “a miracle of grace,” a miracle of amazing grace to be standing before you. In fact, that we are all here, in this place of faith, is a miracle of grace.

However, I say this from a very Catholic perspective. *What do I mean?* From our faith, we always understand **grace**, the transforming power and action of God in our lives, as working in the midst of our natures. As St. Albert the Great insisted, “grace builds upon nature,” and, related, St. Thomas Aquinas said, “Grace perfects nature.” Like the seedbeds of many gardens that are going in, now that our stubborn winter has seemed to yield, we have to prepare the soil, and water and fertilize the seeds if we expect the fruit to be produced, so we need to prepare our hearts, minds and souls for the grace of God to work on us and transform us. The “tilling of the soil” of our souls is our necessary part to receive the transforming, perfecting power of God’s grace. What is this “tilling of the soil” of our souls like?

Jesus says to his disciples as he prepares for his Ascension, “Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature.” While we might wonder why He doesn’t just send his Spirit to do the work, we see that, even from Bethlehem, God desires to work in and **through human nature**. We are saved in and through our humanity, both in Jesus and then through his instruments, his missionaries whom he sends to en flesh the gospel message in human words and actions. The efforts of many teachers and our efforts to grow in our knowledge of the faith that is this “tilling of the soil” without which God’s grace has any fruitful place to land.

While we might think about great, saintly missionaries and teachers of our faith, from the apostles on down, what is true is that the command to “go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature” has happened more humbly. And the most frequently title of these great humble teachers is not “doctor” or professor.” It is probably most commonly “dad” or “mom.” For as our Church teaches in the baptismal rite, parents are “the first teachers of their children in the ways of faith.” I can certainly confirm that my mother’s faithful, persistent, and determined teaching us the faith (daily prayers when we wanted to do something else; going to Mass, when we wanted to do something else; and her constant moral teaching of what rights and wrongs were demanded by the gospel, when we wanted to do something else!) were all the ways she took her part to “go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature.” Moms worked so hard to provide a fertile seedbed of souls upon which miracles of grace could occur!

On this feast of the Ascension, we remember that Jesus has returned to the father. Likewise, through teachers of the gospel (Moms, Dads, teachers, cub scout leaders, religious sisters, priests), we have been given the gift of faith that allows us to follow the Lord in returning to the Father who gave us life. So, thanks to our teachers, our religious sisters, our priests, scout leaders and our friends, who have shown us the way back to the Creator. And, in a special way, today, thanks especially to Moms and foster-moms. For without them, each of us would be what Mrs. Zemeitis predicted of that troublemaking boy: most unlikely to know, love and serve God, and to know the joy that comes from this. And without this knowledge, the world can be a most hopeless, scary place! Now, let us give thanks to all our teachers in the faith, beginning with moms, who have prepared the way for miracles of grace to happen in us. And, in their honor, let’s take up our place to go into our world and “proclaim the gospel to every creature” by what we say and do. We have each been given this gift. We are now obliged to share that gift.