

REFLECTION ON THE GOSPEL OF MT. 28:16-20 - THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD. / 24.05.2020



Reflecting on today's reading from the Gospel of Matthew presents the *farewell of Jesus - a "bitter sweet" experience*, the *commissioned of his disciples - a new way of presence* and *an assurance – a reason for joy*. Normally when someone is leaving, will go or will depart, especially when that someone is dear or close to us, the natural feeling arouses within is aching, because we are going to be far with the person we love and the possibility of not seeing him for a long time or maybe, not having him around really like what we used to. On the other hand, we knew that, that someone will be or go somewhere better than the present one. A "bitter sweet" experienced, similar to that of the disciples in the Ascension of Jesus Christ. After being with him for a certain time, hearing his teaching and learning from him and witnessing his passion, death, resurrection and now the ascension... Jesus' mission is over, now is the time to go back to the Father. He reminds his disciples and us of our culmination, the end of our journey is the Father. The Acts of the Apostles recounts this event as the final separation of the Lord Jesus to his disciples "*... as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him from their sight...*" (cf. Acts 1:6-9). It is a separation, but will be in a new way of presence and with great assurance.

Before lifted up to heaven, Jesus mandated his disciples to an immense and boundless mission "*All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you...*" (cf. Mt.28:18-20). It reminds us of the *mission of the Church*; "*to go forth,*" a Church who is always on the go; to bring his words of salvation, to serve, love, to give witness to him and to encounter Jesus himself in the concrete faces of our brothers and sisters. He who is alive and present in the Church, in his mystical Body "*... I am with you always, until the end of the age.*" (cf. Mt.28:20). This "*new way of presence*" assuring his disciples and us, the Holy Spirit to accompany, guide and be with us. This assurance is a motive for joy and comfort not to fear and feel that we are alone because Jesus ascended into heaven. Instead, it tells us that he is present and knows our reality, brings us strength in our hopelessness, walking with us in times of tribulations, and encouraging us in a challenging moment in the mission and in the proclamation of the Gospel.

May, the feast of the Ascension brings back our gaze towards heaven, to remind us of our final end, which is heaven – a Father waiting for us. And it may keep the fire burning within us to continue the mission that the Lord Jesus entrusted to each and every one of us, filled and with the zeal of the Holy Spirit.