

The Ascension of the Lord (B/09)

I came across a little poem the other day which goes like this:-

I am my neighbour's bible; he reads me when we meet.

Today he reads me in my house, tomorrow in the street.

He may a relative, or friend or slight acquaintance be;

He may not even know my name, yet he is reading me.

Today the task of preaching the Gospel to the world depends on us – you and me. It's a great privilege given to us by Jesus; it can also seem to be a daunting task. But it isn't something we are asked to do alone. We are asked to do it together as a catholic community in our parish, our deanery and our diocese, and together with other Christians in our neighbouring churches. Jesus has also given us the firm assurance that we have the Holy Spirit to help us in carrying out this task.

In the accounts we have just heard in our readings, the apostles liked it on the Mount of Olives so much that they wanted to remain there. But a voice called them back to reality. "Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking up into the heavens?" So they went back down into the real world little realising that their lives would never be the same.

This Feast of the Ascension marks the close of an era. Jesus' journey to God through a human life has been completed by his 'being taken up' into heaven. It also signals the beginning of a new era, that of the mission of the Church in the world which is about to begin. So this Feast is as much about us as it is about Jesus. His Ascension shows us where the goal of our earthly journey lies. It is a goal and a destiny that defies our imagination. It pushes out our horizons beyond the boundaries of this world. It gives an eternal dimension to our lives.

Jesus went back to the Father, the source of all life and love. It is not a journey into outer space but a journey home. His Ascension does not represent his removal from the earth, but his constant presence everywhere on earth. During his earthly ministry he could only be in one place at a time. But now that he is back with the Father, he is present wherever God is present; and that is everywhere - here and now.

We live in the hope that Jesus' words will come true for us: "Where I am, you too shall be". Meanwhile we have a task to do : to preach the Gospel and to be his witnesses in the real world; to live a life according to his teaching and example in the real world.

Today has also been designated by Pope Benedict as World Communications Day. A day when we are encouraged to pray for, and affirm, those working in the media and to recognise that print, broadcast and new media technologies can, if used responsibly, be tools of hope and truth in spreading Christ's Gospel message around the world.

In his message for this day the Holy Father recognises the impact new media has especially on young people and he urges them to be online missionaries.

Our own Bishop Peter has put good and effective communications at the heart of his vision for our diocese when he calls us to have confidence in God and in each other; to have meaningful conversations with God and with each other; and to have a real connection with God and with each other through the Church.

When Jesus says to us today "Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation" he is bestowing on us and this parish, this deanery, this diocese, the task and the privilege of bringing others to him. He has promised us the Holy Spirit as our strength and guide and now we also have the internet and the whole of the broadcasting

media to help us. Today we are being reminded that it is our Christian duty to use them and to make them into tools of hope and truth in spreading the Gospel message and to speak out when we see them being used improperly.

So how can you and I show Jesus to the world around us. I suggest that we might all start by taking home the thought that it all begins with us as individuals because, as the poet said: "I am my neighbour's bible; he reads me when we meet ...You are your neighbour's bible; he reads you when you meet" .