

HOMILY ASCENSION YRB 2018

(Stand staring up at the ceiling for 45 seconds) You are starting to get a little uncomfortable or maybe even annoyed with me, aren't you? If we spent all of our time doing this, not much would get done, would it? But this is exactly what the disciples were doing in the first reading today, weren't they? They were just standing there staring into the sky. In fact, God sent angels to tell them: "why are you standing there looking at the sky? Get on with your lives. Get on with the work you have been called to do. All of you that know about me are to be my witnesses to the world. Don't just stand there staring up at the sky, get on with it.

Today we celebrate the feast of the Ascension of the Lord. This marks the end of the post resurrection appearances of Jesus in the world. In the first reading the disciples are asking Jesus if he is going to restore the kingdom of Israel. They were still looking to Jesus to just take care of everything for them. I think the Ascension was necessary because if that had not occurred, everyone would still be sitting around waiting for God to take care of everything. We are now the hands and feet of Jesus in the world. It is time to get on with evangelizing, all of us.

I am sure there were some disciples who were dragging their feet because they had a lot of questions about what was going to happen in the future. Jesus tells them: "don't worry about that. I will send you the Holy Spirit and he will guide you. We have the same commissioning today. Don't worry that you do not have all the answers, just get on with it and you will be guided by the Holy Spirit. Everyone here is a personal faith, and that is exactly what you have to share with other people. God will bring people into your lives that need to hear your message. Do not be afraid to tell them.

Evangelization has gotten a bad image in the Church because when we think of evangelization we think about reciting memorized bible quotes and forcing people to adopt our beliefs. We do not like that, why would we do that with other people. First of all, we need to share our faith with people when they are open. People are open in times of loss: the death of a loved one; the loss of a job; the end of a relationship. People are open in times of transition: Starting college; graduation; marriage;

having children; changing jobs; retirement; empty nest. People are open in times of suffering: a difficult medical diagnosis; the serious illness of a friend or relative; watching a loved one struggle; a time of great failure or disappointment. These are the times when we are looking for direction in our lives, looking for meaning.

Sometimes we do not know how to start the conversation about our faith. We tend to say: “Everything will be ok. Don’t worry about it.” And if we do talk about God it is usually something like: “Everything happens for a reason. God will take care of everything. I will pray for you.” This pretty much ends the conversation. I think you should start the conversation with questions: “Do you have spiritual beliefs? Who is Jesus to you? Do you go to church anywhere? What are your spiritual beliefs?” Then you listen. Let them tell you their story. Ask more questions: “Why do you feel that way? Tell me more about that. What is your experience?” Do not argue with the person, just listen to them. If the conversation continues, they will eventually ask you what you believe, and that is the opportunity you will have to share your faith. Be led by the Holy Spirit. Say a quick prayer and ask for His guidance. I cannot tell you how many times it turns out that I said exactly the right thing and have no idea where that came from. Actually I do know. It came from the Holy Spirit.

If the person is not open to the discussion, change the subject. It is estimated that people have to be invited into the conversation 7 or 8 times before they want to have the conversation. You may be planting seed. This may be time 1 or 2. If they are open, have further discussion. And it is ok to say that you do not know if you do not know. No one knows everything. Pray with them, right there. Invite them to come to Mass with you.

It is time to get on with the commission that Jesus gave to each of us. Don’t just stand there staring at the sky. We are the hands and feet of Jesus in the world. The only way we will grow our Church is through personal invitation and witness. That is what Jesus did.