**Homily for Ascension Sunday May 15th 2018**

**Acts 1:1-11; Psalm 47:2-3,6-9; Eph 1:17-23; Mark 16:15-20**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In His last discourse to His beloved disciples in the hours before His passion and death, Jesus told them that He would be going away. St John recalls in chapters 14 to 16 of his Gospel that Jesus told them they should not be sad. He said to them “If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I go to the Father” They should rejoice because He was going to be glorified and to take His rightful place at the throne of the Father in Heaven.

Today, we celebrate His Ascension when Jesus left his disciples to take up again His eternal glory. They knew He had been vindicated by the amazing power of God. They realized that Jesus had been as good as His word and had conquered death by rising. He had revealed to them His risen body and now He showed them His glorious ascension. It had been a rough road for them, but they now were justified in putting their faith in Him. Jesus Christ was victorious.

With the psalmist they might have sung “God goes up with shouts of joy

 The Lord goes up with trumpet blast

 Sing praise for God sing praise

 Sing praise to our King sing praise” (Ps 46(47): 6-7).

The eyes of their minds were enlightened and they realized “how infinitely great was the power that He had exercised for us believers” – the strength of the Father’s power at work in Christ to raise Him up from the dead and seat Him in the glory of God “above every Sovereignty, Authority, Power or Domination” (Eph 1:17-23).

But there was another reason why they would have been excited that day, and we should be too. Jesus had promised them before He died that He and the Father would send them the Holy Spirit, Who would teach them and guide them and strengthen them. What was promised was all the power of God’s love poured into their hearts and their souls. Just before He left them, Jesus told His disciples to go back to Jerusalem and wait there, praying to be filled with the Holy Spirit. He said “John baptised with water but you, not many days from now, will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.” And again He told them “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and then you will be my witnesses, not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judea and Samaria, and indeed to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:4-8).

The mission of the infant Church was to take the Good News to the whole world – to everyone. To fulfil this mission, Jesus promised them that they would be clothed with the power of God’s Love, which is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit poured out into them would make them a new creation. The Holy Spirit – Love Divine would transform these timid, hesitant, bewildered and doubting followers into courageous missionary disciples – all of them! Jesus promised them that their proclamation of His Good News would be backed up by the same miraculous power He had exercised in His own ministry on earth. “These are the signs that will be associated with believers: in My Name they will cast out devils; they will have the gift of tongues; … they will lay their hands on the sick who will recover.” And so they did. They went out and “preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word by the signs that accompanied it” (Mark 16:17-20).

Now my dear brothers and sisters, nothing has changed. The same risen, victorious Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father interceding for us. The same Holy Spirit has been given to us in all the riches of His grace and power. The same mission is put before us – bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to all people by word and deed.

Do we feel ready for this assignment? Probably not. The Apostles certainly didn’t. But we don’t have to worry. When the time comes, the Holy Spirit will give us a nudge at the right moment, and He will give us the words to say. All we have to do is to be ready and willing to be used, in the Mission of building the kingdom of God by spreading the Good News.

Many many years ago, at a time when I was under great spiritual stress, I went to a weekend conference - called the Discipleship Conference, run by the Disciples of Jesus, a Catholic Covenant Community in Sydney. The first session, on Friday evening started with singing and prayer. I suppose there were 100 or 150 people there and I was immediately struck by a sense of the presence of the Holy Spirit as they sang and praised God together. Even though I knew practically no-one, I felt very peaceful there.

At one point the person who was leading the session asked us to pray for each other. I looked around me and saw a lady who was a complete stranger to me but I had a sense that it would be good for me to offer to pray with her. I went over to her and asked her if that would be ok and she agreed. I asked her what she wanted prayer for and she said she had a very sore back. So, encouraged by the faith of all the people gathered there, I said a simple prayer for her and asked God to heal her back. I asked her how did she feel.

To my astonishment, she said her back felt completely better. I was simply amazed that God would give such an immediate answer to a prayer for healing that I had said. I knew that God answered prayers and that He sometimes healed people, but it had not occurred to me that He would do so if it was me who was praying. I thought that a healing would only happen if someone very holy prayed, or someone with a very special gift for healing. What that memorable experience taught me is that God gives His Holy Spirit to everyone and the power of His love can go out from every baptised lay person if only they have the boldness to pray with faith.

Dear brothers and sisters, If we want to be docile to the Holy Spirit – if we want to take up Jesus’ great commission to us to spread His Good News and have our words and actions confirmed by signs of the power of the Holy Spirit we would do well to do what the Apostles did after Jesus went up to Heaven. We should spend these days before the feast of Pentecost praying for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit on each and every one of us. We should pray that the Holy Spirit would come as promised and that we would be ready and willing to be set alight by the power of God’s love.

Let us too spend this next week asking to be open to the amazing grace of the Holy Spirit and to be willing to do the work He wants to do in us and through us.

Come Holy Spirit Fill the Hearts of Your faithful and kindle in them the fire of Your love

Send out Your Spirit, Lord, and we will be new creations, and we will renew the face of the earth.