

First Reading: Acts 1.1-11

Second Reading: Ephesians 4.1-13

Gospel: Mark 16.15-20

A wise man once said, “*we must belong to the Church that carries on the life of Christ.*” While Luke’s Gospel is about the life of Jesus, his works, and sufferings - the Book of Acts is about the life and story of the early Christian Church; how the Church carries on the life of Christ.

We are talking about the “Kingdom of God”; founded on love. And it is from here that we are invited to a summons which will help us to prepare in a sense for the second coming of Christ; perhaps with his presence within each of us.

Paul’s letter to the Ephesians reminds us how we have been called to live and maintain a new relationship of peace; by invoking the qualities of deep humility, gentleness, enduring patience, and love. He speaks of the unity of the Christian community with Christ as the head and the Church as the body. One God, one faith, one baptism. Different gifts are given to different people; some are to be apostles, prophets, preachers, pastors, teachers, parents just to name a few: all to build up the Body of Christ. All to serve God, the Church and each other.

It is in the Gospel that we see Jesus’s disciples being sent out – the apostles and the women. Quite literally they are being sent to preach, evangelize, heal: to spread the Good News. This is the commission of the early church and the church today.

Did you know that one of the stained-glass windows in St. Joe’s carries the words of that commissioning as they are written in the Oblate motto? The window reads: “*Evangelizare pauperibus misit me; pauperes evangelizantur*”. We are sent to evangelize the poor; the poor are evangelized. This is the mission of our parish, the mission of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, the

mission of the Church and the *missio Dei*, God's mission. We are all called to be ministers of this service. The Encyclopedia of Christianity defines ministry as "carrying forth Christ's mission in the world"; and we are commissioned – sent out in our baptism.

In this time following the Easter resurrection Jesus has been preparing his disciples (and us) to carry on his mission and letting them know that he would be with them in a new way which was coming. We recognize this as Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit which we know of now but when Jesus ascended into heaven, they had not yet experienced the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus was taken up into heaven – it must have been like a death nell for his disciples and followers. He had been crucified – taken from them, and then he was resurrected. And just as they were getting used to this new Jesus once again, he leaves them. Imagine their pain and sorrow, their disbelief, the emptiness they must have felt within themselves. Once again, they were being asked to let go of that which they loved dearly, their master, their Lord...

Some years ago, I was asked to write the prayers for the Oblate Convocation. When I asked what the focus of the Convocation was to be I was told it was about their structures. "Buildings?" I asked. No was the response, who we are, how we are called to live.

What does that mean I asked myself? Give me the words I pleaded with God. I had just completed a video session from Ron Rolheiser which was about living within the Paschal Mystery. Knowing some of what was going to come up at the convocation I wrote my prayers with a focus on that movement, that dance of life that is the Paschal Mystery. The "passion, death and resurrection of Jesus" – but it does not stop there: for then there is the Ascension of Jesus into heaven so

that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus can come upon us. Essentially, we must let go of our pain, struggles and sometimes even our joys: giving them to God - to make space within us so God can fill us.

Those first disciples had to let go of their latest image of Jesus in order to receive something new –the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the indwelling of the breath of Jesus within them. This is how the Paschal Mystery lives within us.

Since the beginning of the Pandemic, a little over a year ago - we have been caught up in the sorrows and deaths, the losses of loved ones, our freedoms, our ritual practices at Church – all of this and more. We have had to let go of a lot and it has been difficult. I personally miss touching people, hugging them, sharing a meal with them. Some keep talking about going back to their old normal and doing what they used to do. But like Adam and Eve we've lost our original innocence and freedom to do as we like in the garden of life. We can't go back to the way we were and we're not sure of the way forward. And it can be hard to let go of something that is so intimately familiar because the known always seems a little bit easier than the unknown.

In 1998 the movie “City of Angels” came out; it began and ended with the image of angel/persons standing on the beach, on the tops of buildings and even the tops of mountains all facing the rising sun. It was a magnificent sight.

I have just moved into a new apartment – it is 10 stories up and I look west over many tall apartment and office buildings. From my window I can see the Peace Tower and the spires on Parliament Hill. The panorama begins in the north with the Gatineau Hills and ends in the south towards the airport. I really wanted to be able to see the beautiful sunrises, but I am facing west and so that is not possible. I had to let go of that way of seeing it and now I can experience it as it

is reflected off the clouds and the hills. The fiery brilliance is reflected in the windows of offices and apartments. It is familiar and ordinary, yet utterly unexpected and different with each blink of the eye. It is glorious – it is a part of the glory of God. It fills my senses and takes away my breath. And I am content with how I now experience it.

Letting go of the past and letting go of what we can or cannot do, allows us to be free to enjoy the new, the present. It allows us to go deeper, with each other and with God. Just as I recognise that I am not in the same space or building as all of you because of the pandemic, technology allows me to join you, in a new way of praying together. Namaste! The Spirit of God within me greets the spirit of God in each of you.

I have had to let go of what I knew and experienced so I could be with you this morning. The disciples had to let go of Jesus as they knew him in order to receive the Holy Spirit and be sent out to preach the *missio Dei*.

This is the Paschal Mystery and how it is lived every day. This is how we belong to the Church that carries on the life of Christ.