

**Feast of the Ascension**  
**Prepared by Sr. Claudette Laverdiere, MM**

First reading: Acts 1: 1-11	We are Jesus' witnesses to the ends of the earth. With the disciples, we peer into the void as Jesus is hidden from our view, but as the two men in white robes admonish us, "Why are you looking up to heaven?" they affirm that our work is here on earth. It is urgent that we get on with it.
Responsorial psalm: Psalm 47: 2-3, 6-9	God's authority, conferred on Jesus, is over all the peoples of the earth. No one is left out.
Second reading: Ephesians 1: 17-23	That we may see with the eyes of the heart, that is the substance of the great prayer for us, Jesus' followers, as we strive to be his witnesses in our broken world.
Gospel: Matt 28: 16-20	Jesus has not left us. He is with us always.

As human beings we long to make a difference in this world and to leave it a better place because we have lived. No enterprise can engage our highest aspirations more effectively and completely than the universal mission Jesus entrusted to us, his followers.

The Gospel for the feast of the Ascension confirms us in this mission and focuses our attention on what is required of us. Vested with "all authority," Jesus imparts his mission to his followers. They are to make disciples of all nations, baptize them in the name of the Trinity and teach them to observe all that he has commanded them.

"All that I have commanded you" evokes the entire Gospel. While Jesus was on earth, he prepared the way, teaching his followers all that made for life. They were to love one another as God loved them, even strangers and yes, even enemies. Universal mission would be an overwhelming task were it not for Jesus' dynamic promise: "I am with you all days." On a daily basis, day by day, Jesus' abiding presence makes it possible for us to do as he did, to give of ourselves as nourishment for others.

A missionary sister relates that some years ago in Nairobi, after a long teaching day, she stopped at a local bakery to pick up a few dinner rolls as a treat for her community of three.

*No sooner had I got out of the car than three young children came up to me, pleading for something to eat. The oldest was probably seven and the other two, a little boy and a little girl, four or five. The oldest spoke for all three when he said, "We are so hungry." I looked around, expecting to see an adult lurking in a corner or behind a post, but I did not see anyone. In Nairobi it is not unusual for impoverished parents to send their children out to beg. We all know how impossible it is to ignore a hungry child. Expecting to be beaten if they return with empty hands, the children are often extremely insistent. These three were well-mannered and soft-spoken. They made known their need and waited politely, probably hoping against hope that I would not simply walk away.*

*Many other shoppers hurried passed us, furtively glancing our way. I smiled at the children and told them to wait there, that I would be right back. I had intended to purchase one packet of six rolls. Instead I bought two. I gave one packet to the oldest boy, telling him to be sure to share the rolls with his little sister and brother. As I walked to the car, I looked back and watched a drama unfold. The seven-year-old had ripped open the bag and was placing two rolls in his siblings' hands, "Two for you and two for you." And then, as if on cue, all three practically inhaled the rolls. They could not eat them fast enough.*

In the following months, the sister stopped at this bakery once in a while, but she never again saw those children whose hunger had been etched into her memory. “It is an open question,” she says, “as to who nourished whom.” After any such experience, one can never rest easy, knowing all too well that mission requires us to get involved, just as Jesus did, in the individual and social contradictions of life.

Sometimes Jesus soothed an aching heart by the mere touch of his hand. Always, he was genuinely outraged by the dehumanizing situations confronting him. Time and again, he reinstated the marginalized into society. Like Jesus, his followers are those who can never turn their backs on the poor. The poor and needy must always be in our faces. The following of Christ requires it. We are to look and act so much like Jesus that we can be mistaken for him.

An election year offers unique opportunities to raise the general consciousness regarding the fate of so many of our sisters and brothers in this country and everywhere. The spiraling disintegration of supportive social structures leaves millions at risk. Beginning in our own neighborhoods, what if we worked together to galvanize our parish communities on this issue?

In face of overwhelming odds – issues impinge on one another globally – we may well ask how it is possible for mere human beings to participate in the very work of God, a work that encompasses the whole world? Today’s reading from Acts answers that question for us. We are empowered by the Holy Spirit. This assurance also enables us to perceive the Ascension differently. Jesus has not absolutely departed from us. Rather, he is among us in his transformed presence. Transcending all human limitations of time and space, the Risen Christ is with us all ways, as the Gospel reading attests.

To help us grasp what this means for us, the author of Ephesians offers a wonderful prayer: that we may have an intimate experience of the Holy One. He would have us see with the eyes of our heart, thus enabling us to understand that our final destiny is to be with God whose power is already at work in us through Jesus’ resurrection.

This power, conferred on the Risen Christ and so liberally passed on to us through the Holy Spirit for our mission to the ends of the earth, is the substance of Psalm 47 in today’s liturgy. No matter how far we look, God’s dominion extends over all. This is not a victory chant. God’s dominion is universal and eternal, no question. However, in this psalm, the author actualizes God’s enthronement anew. He would have us see it as if for the first time, rekindling our hope that God’s reign may find a home in every human heart.

#### **For more information:**

Read more in *Loving Our Neighbor in a Shrinking World*, a resource developed by Maryknoll missionaries who witness the global impact of U.S. political and economic decisions. Through this resource, Maryknoll missionaries encourage voters in the 2008 elections to scrutinize candidates’ policy proposals through the lens of those who, both in the U.S. and overseas, lack basic necessities, endure the source of racism, live with gender-based discrimination or feel the immediate impact of climate change.

*[Email](mailto:ogc@maryknoll.org) for a copy, or find the election guide here:  
[www.maryknollogc.org/2008elections/index.htm](http://www.maryknollogc.org/2008elections/index.htm)*

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