

WORK THAT MUST BE DONE

Solemnity of the Ascension

Acts of the Apostles 1:1-11

Psalms 47:2-3, 6-7, 8-9

Ephesians 1:17-23

Luke 24:46-53

There is a well known, if not somewhat comical, psychological exercise in which one or two students stand in a crowded area -- a mall or a carnival setting - - and simply look up. Another individual stands a short distance from them, observing how frequently and how many people passing by pause to also look up and see what this person or persons are so intently looking at.

The scene at the Ascension has a similar and somewhat comical ending in which, having just observed Jesus' departure, there are, not one, not two, but eleven men standing there staring upward. So intently are they focused on the heavens that they do not notice the two men in white, also pausing to look up and asking, "Why are you standing there looking up into the sky?"

Every year we celebrate the beginning of the end to our annual Easter Season with the Solemnity of the Ascension of Jesus. We remember when Christ took leave of His Disciples, promising to one day return.

The event of the Ascension, however, is not only about the departure. Jesus also commissioned His Apostles to carry on the work He had begun in

proclaiming the Kingdom of God and the salvation of souls. In the Gospel of Matthew he declares, "Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching all that I have commanded you" (Mt 28:19). In Mark, He declares, "Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature" (Mk 16:15). In Luke He declares, "repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Lk 24:47). Finally, in the Acts of the Apostles, prior to His Ascension Jesus says to the Eleven, "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Thus, the question, asked by the two men in white to the Eleven Apostles, following Jesus' Ascension, stands to reason. Why are they looking up into the sky, when they have important work to do?

As Christians, we "await the blessed hope and the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ." We pray, "Maranatha," "Come, Lord Jesus." However, we are reminded that our focus is not, nor should it be, on



The Ascension: Work that Must be Done

gazing into the heavens. While we await Jesus' Return in glory, we do not actively look for it. We do not stand with our gaze fixed on the sky, looking for Jesus to descend from the clouds -- nor do we seek to calculate the exact time and place of His Return, or attempt to predict it based on sacred writings or the ecstatic proclamations of self-styled visionaries. Not even Jesus is granted this information as he tells us that only the Father knows the day and the hour (Mt 24:36, Mk 13:32, Acts 1:7).

Like the Eleven, we have work to do. We must carry on the mission to proclaim the Gospel to whole world, to every living

creature, to make disciples of all the nations, to preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins, to baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. We must not become so distracted by "looking" for Christ's Return that we stand idly, gazing up into the sky. Instead, we direct our focus on fulfilling the commission of evangelization we have received, "as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ."

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