

The Ascension of the Lord, Year B

GOSPEL

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Jesus showed himself to the Eleven and said to them:

‘Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation. He who believes and is baptised will be saved; he who does not believe will be condemned. 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 pick up snakes in their hands, and be unharmed should they drink deadly poison; they will lay their hands on the sick, who will recover.’

And so the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven: there at the right hand of God he took his place, while they, going out, preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word by the signs that accompanied it.

(Mark 16:15–20)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- These final verses of Mark’s Gospel were a later addition to the original ending of the women at the empty tomb. They show that from the earliest of times, the disciples realised that although Jesus was no longer physically present, ‘the Lord was working with them.’
- The word *apostle* comes from the Greek for ‘one who is sent out’.
- Mark uses the dramatic figures of speech about serpents and poisons to illustrate that those who believe in the Good News and preach it can overcome all that threatens or destroys life.
- All the baptised share in this missionary task of the Church: to go out to proclaim the Good News ‘to all creation’. Popes John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis have all called on Christians to be bringers of good news to creation. We must be stewards of the earth and all its resources to ensure that future generations inherit an environment that God gifted to all humanity.

EXPLORING THE WORD

The central point of this gospel is the instruction that Jesus gives to the disciples to continue his work and mission: to take the Good News of the Gospel to the whole world and to all creation. He warns that this task may not be easy and that some will reject the message the disciples bring, but for those who do accept it the rewards will be great. They will overcome all that impedes or threatens life and will be given great gifts. In the preaching of the Gospel, Jesus is still present and working with them.

The disciples unquestioningly carry out the instructions they are given. The preaching and the sacramental life of the Christian Church is the continuation of the presence of Jesus in the world.

- What hope is offered to us by Jesus taking up his place at the right hand of God?
- What signs of hope accompany the work of the Church in the world today?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- What ‘good news’ does our world need today?
- How do you experience Jesus’ presence, even though he is absent?
- This gospel tells of the closing of one era and the opening up of another. What experiences have you had of closing off one chapter of your life and the opening of another. Share your stories. In what ways was your baptism or acceptance into the Church the beginning of a new way?
- Make a special effort this week to be good news for others or for the earth. Plant a tree, refuse plastic bags at the supermarket, recycle, conserve water and reduce waste.
- Use this simple prayer often this week:

God draw us to you and lift our spirits on high.

