

Gospel – Mark 16: 15–20

Homily – St Carthage’s Sunday 12 May 2024

Feast of the Ascension and Mothers’ Day. Written and delivered by Margaret Rush

Good morning Friends,

We have listened to Mark’s Gospel account of the final hours that the Incarnate Christ Jesus shared with his disciples. The Gospel of Mark has two endings, a short and a longer ending from which the gospel reading today has come, however the message that Jesus gives to his disciples and to us is the same in each case. I repeat the words of today’s gospel “Go out into the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation”

Prior to ascending to the Father, Jesus assures his followers that they and we will never be left alone. The final sentence of Matthew’s Gospel reads – “and remember I am with you always, to the end of the age”.

The Gospel of Luke and today’s reading from The Acts are the only times the Ascension story is recounted in some detail. Both these texts have the same author, Luke the Evangelist, but they vary in chronological detail. In the gospel account, the Ascension occurs on the day of the Resurrection of Jesus and in The Acts, the Ascension occurs 40 days after the Resurrection.

Today, Mark’s Gospel informs us that “the Lord Jesus after he had spoken with them (his disciples) was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right of God”. In affirming this belief each time we say the Creed, we acknowledge that the Incarnate Christ Jesus has assumed equal status to the Father within the Godhead. I have learned that in ancient times to sit at the right hand of somebody showed equality in status.

On 17 April 2013 at a general audience in St Peter’s Square, the subject of the Pope Francis’s address was “Catechesis on the Creed - the Ascension of Jesus”. Some of the words of Pope Francis spoke to me with hopeful meaning and I would like to share a small quote with you. Pope Francis is impressing upon us that the ascended Jesus is our Advocate.

“He is our Advocate: he always defends us. Don’t forget this! The Ascension of Jesus into heaven acquaints us with this deeply consoling reality on our journey: in Christ, true God and true man, our humanity was taken to God. Christ opened the path to us. He is like a roped guide climbing a mountain who, on reaching the summit, pulls us up to him and leads us to God”. In each of the Gospels the words may differ but the final message we receive from Jesus impels us to go out, go forth and proclaim his good news of love and salvation.

Today we are celebrating Mother's Day and as we "go forth" with the intention of responding to the final directives of Jesus we remember all mothers from the time of creation. Mary, the mother of Jesus is our mother and our sister. In prayer we remember Mary today and we also remember the other women who were present with her in the safety of the waiting room.

Mother's Day is a time of great joy for many, but I know that for many others it is a day of painful remembrances and sadness. I dare to suggest that we might change the noun to a verb and celebrate "Mothering Day".

How do we mother?

This definition is from the Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary and Thesaurus (Cambridge University Press). To mother, "to treat a person with great kindness and love and to try to protect them from anything dangerous or difficult".

Does not today's Gospel and all the Gospels give us a picture of Jesus the Motherer. Jesus spent his days loving, caring (he fed 5000 people in just one instance), healing and listening. He cured on the Sabbath day, he broke the purity laws to give help and healing to the poor and the marginalised. The death of Jesus is his greatest act of love.

It is with Jesus, our Advocate and Motherer and Mary the mother of Jesus, our mother and sister in our hearts that we pray today for all mothers and all who mother. We remember in a special way those who are suffering particularly in Gaza, Israel, Ukraine, Russia and throughout Africa. We remember our indigenous mothers and motherers many of whom have suffered greatly and we honour their spiritual closeness with our mother Earth. In the words of Saint Francis of Assisi, "All praise be yours my Lord, through Sister Earth our mother, who feeds us in her sovereignty and produces various fruits with coloured flowers and herbs."

Thank you.