

05/17/15 Ascension B

-- All too often, we tend to look at the Ascension as a 1st century version of a space shot. Perhaps that's because of much of the art around it.

-- In fact, though, this feast celebrates a new phase in God's work on earth. The human Jesus has accomplished his mission. Now God's presence continues: 1) Through his people, the Church; 2) Through the presence of the Holy Spirit, which will be highlighted more next week.

-- This year, we hear Mark's account of the Ascension. As in Matthew, Jesus commissions the disciples to proclaim the gospel, but he also gives some signs of his work on earth.

-- We've heard fundamentalist interpretations of these. The extreme examples come from some Holiness Churches where the ministers handle poisonous snakes. Some have been bitten, and refuse treatment.

-- I have to admire their faith, but I really think Jesus has something else in mind. I would like to offer some suggestions on how these signs translate into early 21st century Christian living.

-- *They will drive out demons...* True, there are a few trained exorcists, but most of us aren't. But we can all be conscious of evil. We can help people afflicted with the demons of depression, addictions of various kinds. We can be a support for them and pray for them. That prayer is truly powerful.

-- *They will speak new languages...* Some Christians take time to learn new languages, not for business or profit motives, but to communicate better and promote understanding with people of different cultures.

-- Whether we're multilingual, bilingual, or only speak English, all of us can be sensitive to those of other cultures, social classes and religions. We can make better efforts to understand them and fight prejudice.

-- *They will pick up serpents, drink deadly poison without harm...* As Christians we are to be in the world but not of the world. Part of the

Christian genius has been to develop what is good in worldly pursuits without being infected by the bad.

-- We need to use this principle in applying scientific knowledge in a moral way, in our use of social media (without allowing it to control us), and in many other aspects of life. (Seniors, note this for your future)

-- *They will lay hands on the sick, who will recover...* There are many followers of Christ in the healing occupations who consider it a vocation. All of us can be healers in some way: healing divisions in our family or communities, encouraging dialogue rather than confrontation, being careful in how we characterize others who disagree with us.

-- The Ascension is God's promise to be with us even when the human Jesus is no longer on earth. The Holy Spirit working in the Church and God's people confirms that promise.

-- As long as we sincerely try to be God's faithful witnesses, we need not fear or look backwards. The Lord will work through us, and will show that through visible signs that the world will not be able to ignore.