

## GO, MAKE DISCIPLES, BAPTIZE, TEACH

It was on Sunday December 22, of last year, the fourth Sunday of Advent. We listened to the first chapter of Matthew's gospel about the annunciation to St. Joseph. The angel quoting Isaiah says, *they shall name him Emmanuel which means "God is with us."* Interestingly enough, throughout the gospel, Jesus is never called, Emmanuel. And today we hear from the 28<sup>th</sup> and final chapter of Matthew's gospel, the conclusion.

It says they worshiped and then Jesus approached them and saying that all authority in heaven and earth has been given to him. These two verses reveal to us that he's truly God. But he concludes saying, *I am with you always*. In other words, he is Emmanuel, God with us.

Jesus also gives four commands: go, make disciples, baptize and teach. Go—Jesus doesn't want the apostles to stay on the mountain top but to go forth. He sends them. The word, *apostle*, means, *one who is sent*.

Make disciples—They are to share the good news, tell others about Jesus, they are to evangelize. And Jesus doesn't limit to whom they are to share this message. *Make disciples of all nations*, not just some nations but *all* nations. Everyone is to be invited to the kingdom of God, to be invited to the feast. Not all will accept the invitation but all are to be invited. This mission to make disciples is universal, it's a catholic vision as the word, *catholic*, literally means, *universal*. Just as on the cross Jesus stretched out his arms to embrace all the world, so we are called to embrace all the world. The apostles were also disciples who are sent to make more disciples. What does this involve?

Baptism. Baptism is essential to the Christian life. It's the gateway to life in the Spirit [CCC 1213]. We're baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, in the name of God one in three and three in one. In baptism we share in the dying and rising of Jesus, sin is forgiven and we are brought into relationship with the Trinity. Baptism isn't optional. Baptism isn't merely something nice. To baptize and to be baptized is to fulfill what Jesus commands. And then after that we

are to continue to grow and deepen in the new life that flows from baptism. Baptism doesn't just confirm what may have happened, it brings about sharing in divine life and it changes us. A baptized person is different from someone who isn't. But there's more.

Jesus gives the command to teach others, and then he gets more specific, to teach them to observe all that he has commanded, all. No matter what our profession, we all teach, we teach by our example and hopefully by our words. To teach here means to share the gospel and it calls us to be faithful to what Jesus has taught us. Story about Pope Francis as a child and his grandmother on Good Friday.

Go, make disciples, baptize and teach. Jesus gives this mission to the apostles and he gives this mission to the Church. Now the Church is apostolic as we profess every Sunday which is to say that we are connected to the apostles. We do this as missionary disciples. We're all called to be disciples, to follow Jesus but we're all on a mission, we are sent in one way or another. I'm here at St. Therese because I have been sent here by my bishop and so is Father Andrew and someday we will be sent somewhere else.

Each of us has our own mission to fulfill each in our own way but each as a missionary disciple of Jesus. Single people and the widowed often have more time to pray for others and be of service to others. Husbands and wives are missioned to minister to each other. Parents are missionaries but in a different sense. They aren't sent somewhere but rather their mission, their children are sent to them and they are to make disciples of them, to have them baptized and to teach them.

All of us in our circumstances of daily life are called to share in the gospel, not by standing on a soapbox but by living out our lives faithfully, by letting the light of Christ shine through us. By sharing with others the gifts of discipleship and baptism that we have all received.

If we are to teach others that means first we must be learners. God gives us a mind for us to use. He gives us an intellect so that we can learn more about him and hopefully love him and our neighbor more and better every day. Think about how much time you spend on Facebook, or other social media or sitting down in front of the television. What if we spent a small portion of that time everyday in reading the Bible, in prayer or good spiritual reading. To believe in what Jesus teaches isn't just

a duty but a privilege and to share the gospel, isn't just a duty but a privilege as well.

Simply put, the love of God that we have received we are to share with others. The Ascension marks the conclusion of Jesus' earthly ministry. He now entrusts that work to his faithful people, to his Church. God is love. God loves us and God desires our love. And he desire that we share his love.

And we don't do any of this by ourselves. We remember those words of Jesus, *I am with you always*. Jesus disappears from the apostles but remains with them and with us. Jesus remains present when we gather in his name and through those who minister in his name. He is present in his word, in our neighbor, particularly in those who are in need. He is present in sacraments and in a very special way through the sacrament of the Eucharist where he continues to give himself to us and nourish us with himself with his body and blood, under the form of bread and wine.

The Ascension marks an interplay of presence and absence. Jesus departs but not before saying he is with us always. Jesus ascends to the Father with a human body. As Christ's faithful people we form the body of Christ with Jesus as our head. Jesus returns to the Father and we remain here but yet Jesus remains here on earth in his body and still in one way we are already in heaven through Christ our head. He is gone and yet he remains here with us.

We don't journey alone. We don't live life alone. Jesus, who is Emmanuel, remains present with us; in good times and in bad, in joy and sorrow, in health and pandemic and in so many other circumstances. With lives of intentional faith may we go forth, make disciples, lead them to baptism and teach them all he has commanded us. Where do we find strength to do all this? Tune in next week and find out.