

Ascension of the Lord, Yr. B, Xavier Church, Acts, 1, 1-11; Ps. 47, 2-3, 6-9; Eph., 1, 17-23; Mk. 16, 15-20.

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Brothers and sisters, for the apostles the period after Easter, after the Lord's resurrection is an intermediate stage, they do not yet know exactly what their lives will look like. The Lord has showed them that He was alive. No doubt this has filled them with great joy, but what this means for themselves is not yet entirely clear. So, they asked Jesus: 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?'

That was still on the disciples' minds. Back to the glorious period of King David and his successors and free from Roman rule. But Jesus' answer goes much further. 'You will receive power from the Holy Spirit who is coming upon you, to be my witnesses to the ends of the earth.' Certainly, also in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, but through the Holy Spirit God will reveal himself to the borders of the earth.

Now, if we look around us in Europe, it seems as if Christianity is on the wane. But if we really want to know what is going on in the world, we must look just a little further. Then we see that in countries like Nigeria, India, South Korea and many countries in Africa, Christianity is actually growing. And in Europe, Catholic migrant communities are growing, including here with us, which is an enrichment of the Christian life in this part of the world. All this happens because people are willing to witness to their faith themselves and want to take the Word from the Bible further, in their own families, their own circle of friends, or to people who have heard little of it. And this growth does not happen through the power of colonial or dictatorial rule, but through the power of the Word itself and along the path of personal conversion, as people listen to the Spirit in silence.

Jesus says: 'Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.' Faith without baptism is insufficient to be part of the body of Christ when it is possible to receive baptism from someone and when one is not hindered from doing so, as unfortunately is still the case in a number of countries.

Jesus asks the disciples to stay in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit will come upon them. And with St. Paul, we hear more about how the Spirit works in us: it is the Spirit of wisdom, who will fill us with hope.

We see this in the rich inheritance left to us by the saints. The saints show us how we can live, filled with the Spirit. It is the Spirit who gives unity in the Church. Alone we cannot manage, but together we are strong.

St. Paul also speaks of an overpowering power, but then we must pay attention: it is the power of Christ in us who believe. This goes far beyond all earthly powers. It is a power, which rather shows itself in vulnerability, because the message of Christianity is so thoroughly human. Between Ascension and Pentecost, the disciples are gathered in the upper room, together with Mary, the mother of Jesus and with his brothers. They remain in prayer, awaiting the fulfilment of the Father's promise.

Here, as always in the Church, it is about people who are together and in need of salvation, who do not always have the answer ready themselves either, but who try to live as honestly and authentically as possible, caring for the sick and the poor, for those in spiritual need, for the education of our youth. Therein lies the real power, bestowed by the Holy Spirit. Amen.