

Disappear vs. Leave

By: Fr. Phil Bloom

Bottom line: Although Jesus has disappeared from our sight, he did not leave us. And he tells us, "You will be my witnesses."

Today we celebrate the Ascension of the Lord. Our first reading gives a clue to the meaning of this mystery. You will notice that St. Luke does not speak about Jesus "going away," but that "a cloud took him from their sight." There is a difference between "leaving" and "disappearing." When someone leaves, it suggests separation, even finality. When a person disappears from sight, he might still be very close—in another room. Or even closer. Have you never had the experience of thinking that someone has disappeared, but then realized he is standing right next to you? The fact that the disciples no longer see Jesus does not mean that he has gone from them.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, we are in a better position to understand how someone can disappear from sight—and still be very close. We have movies like "The Matrix" that involve a separate dimensions of reality—one unseen by the other. And scientists are now speaking about the possibility of parallel universes or "multiverses." All this should not sound strange to us. As Christians we have always known that a parallel realm exists, that it has an effect on our everyday reality and that we can interact with it.

Jesus wants us to know about this other dimension—and he wants something else. He wants us to witness to it. You will notice that the word "witness" comes up in both the first reading and the Gospel. Pope Paul VI said, "The world needs witnesses more than it needs teachers." You know, it is relatively easy to be a teacher. Most people are eager to share their knowledge—and especially their opinions. It is much harder to be a witness: To tell others what one has experienced. That can be risky and demanding. Two people can live under the same roof and never share their deepest experiences.

What are the experiences Jesus wants us to share—to witness to others? It could be a lot of things, but today's Gospel gives us the starting point: "Repentance, for the forgiveness of sins."

Let me tell you about a man who gave a powerful witness to repentance and forgiveness. He was a slave trader, will little religious feeling. Or to be more accu-

rate, whatever religious sentiment he had, he numbed with alcohol. Once when he piloted a slave ship across the Atlantic, a violent storm broke out. Something caused him to cry, "Jesus, have mercy on us." When the storm subsided, he reflected on what happened—and he gave up the slave trade. The captain was John Newton. You can see his name in our parish hymnal; he wrote a song that begins with these words, "Amazing grace, how sweet sound, that saved a wretch like me..."

Now, you and I may not have had such a dramatic experience as John Newton. We haven't enslaved others for personal gain. Or have we? We have not bought and sold other human beings, but at times we have not treated someone as a person, but as an object, an instrument of selfish desires. We have sinned, but—like John Newton—we can repent and beg forgiveness. We can open ourselves to the "amazing grace" that lets us make a fresh start. And like Newton, we can witness to what Jesus has done for us..

Each person here has a story—an experience of Jesus' amazing grace. That story has enormous power. Sometimes we complain about our bishops and other spiritual leaders, that they need to do more. Fair enough, but we also need to ask what we are doing. Are you and I witnessing to our faith?

As the school year comes to an end, we are also wrapping up our religious education programs. We look forward to a bit more time with family and friends. And hopefully, some recreation. Will we also be witnesses—to forgiveness, to hope, to a new beginning? Will we show that we believe in the new dimension Jesus has opened for us—by prayer, by making Sunday mass our priority? Those are the things our children will remember more than any lecture. They might forget your words of wisdom, but they will remember your witness. They will remember your reverence, your prayer, your practice.

Jesus has ascended into heaven and he wants us to be his witnesses. Like the apostles, we start in Jerusalem, that is, right where we find ourselves. In gentle ways we can witness to Jesus' power, to how he gives forgiveness—a second chance. Although Jesus has disappeared from our sight, he did not leave us. And he tells us, "You will be my witnesses."

READINGS OF THE WEEK

Acts 1:1-11

Hebrews 9:24-28, 10:19-23

Luke 24:46-53

May 12, 2013

靈 修 生 活

捲 起 袖 子 好 好 工 作

曾 慶 導 神 父

天主子從天降下，取了人性成爲人。今天，教會慶祝主耶穌完成了祂來世界的使命，祂的靈肉光榮升天。耶穌升天的重要意義是人性的救贖和提升。人性因爲在主耶穌「一位二性」的結合而獲得完滿的救贖，主耶穌這「新亞當」代表了所有願意被救贖的新人。被救贖的新人是「籍著基督，偕同基督，在基督內」，獲得受造的人性本來無法奢求的造物主天主性的生命--永恆生命！

今天的福音《路加福音》的結語。主耶穌在升天前，就如祂復活後每次顯現給門徒們時，再次隆重地賦予門徒們一個見證基督、向萬國萬民傳福音的命令。今天我們要再次重溫耶穌的命令和差遣：把祂的名傳遍萬國。主耶穌二千年前給門徒這福音命令時，已經知道界上有其他宗教的存在：羅馬人、希臘人、埃及人的宗教，甚至東方的印度教、佛教等。值得注意的是，主耶穌沒有叫門徒們去和這些宗教作宗教交談，而是要把祂的名字傳遍萬國。今天的宗教交談雖然重要，卻絕不能代替福傳工作。誰接受門徒們的見證，又向人見證基督的人是有福的，主耶穌親自舉手降福他們(福音)。

今天的讀經一是聖史路加繼《路加福音》結語之後的後續，也是紀錄初生教會籍傳福音不斷成長發展的《宗徒大事錄》的開始。升了天的耶穌留下門徒，在祂的聖神大能的帶領下，把關於主耶穌的所見所聞傳給別。門徒們不能只坐著望天，等待主耶穌在「千禧年」等等的時刻到來，而要捲起袖子好好地工作，讓人人都認識耶穌，按基督的教訓生活而獲得永生。門徒們有工作要做。

主耶穌的救恩是普世性的，每個人都獲邀接受祂的救恩，不論是東方人還是西方人。主耶穌救恩的「普世性」正是由於主耶穌自身的「獨特性」。祂無須一次又一次地奉獻自己，卻只出現一次，一次而永遠地以自己作犧牲，除免了大眾的罪過，清除良心的邪惡，把大家帶入了天上本境的聖所《讀經二》。假如祂不是獨特的「神--人」，祂的奉獻只能達到有限的效果，需要像猶太人的大司祭一樣，每年進入那人造的聖所，一次又一次地獻祭。主耶穌如果不是如此「獨特」，是無法作「普世」的救主的，我們今天千萬不要削弱了基督的獨特性，把祂宣講成只是眾多聖者、賢哲之一而已。

今天主耶穌升天前「往訓萬民」的命令，更催迫我們反省自己及自己堂區的傳教工作。教會存在的唯一理由是爲了傳揚基督。我們每一個教會團體、每一個教區或堂區都應把傳教放在第一優先，特別是得到人力、財力的支持。傳教不能只靠幾個神職人員或專職的傳教員，而是每一個教友應做的「草根性」運動。在神職人員或傳教員的帶領和協調下，我們三、四個或四、五個住在附近的教友可以定期(一、二個星期一次)聚在一起，並且一定要邀請幾個尚未認識基督的親朋鄰居參加聚會。聚會時可多唱幾首好聽的聖歌、恭念玫瑰經、讀一兩段聖經後靜默反省(如主日讀經或選讀一些有特別意義的章節。若讀經默想後要分享，以簡短扼要爲宜，無須深入研究)；把天主是愛、天主子耶穌爲人捨生、聖神帶領教會、永生幸福的許諾、聖母瑪利亞等信經裡的道理簡單介紹給非教友(也無須深入講大道理)，再唱幾首聖歌，最後以分享各自帶來的點心或菜餚作結束。如果非教友想進一步了解天主教道理，可以介紹給堂區神父或慕道班，並盡可能在慕道期陪伴他們。不知大家認爲這「草根性」福傳方法是否可行？要不要試一試？籍每一個教友的關心和愛心的參與及見證，我們的福傳工作一定會有起色，並會因此帶動靈修、牧民、禮儀、聖召、社會關懷等其他各方面的教會生活，進而改造社會和世界！「我們不做，誰做？」

我們可最好的福音喜訊----「天主竟這樣愛了世界，甚至賜下了自己的獨生子……」(若三 16)。我們與人分享的不是見不得人的次等劣貨，我們應充滿自信地、尊重而又堅定地傳揚那唯一的耶穌基督，以及祂帶給人的永福！

摘自「教友生活周刊」

本 週 讀 經

二 零 一 三 年 五 月 十 二 日

宗 1:1-11 ； 希 9:24-28 , 10:19-23 ； 路 24:46-53