

Homily for the Ascension of the Lord – Year A

Readings: Acts 1: 1-11, Ephesians 1: 17-23, Matthew 28: 16-20



Fr Michael says:

“What Jesus means by goodbye”

The reality of Jesus’ words about saying “farewell” is shown today: it is the coming of age of the Christian Community, invited to stand on its own two feet and live with the Christ who is IN them and no longer WITH them visibly. The disciples are told not to stay looking up into heaven, but go and fulfil their ministry! Jesus is shown to be the Head of the Church and Lord of Creation and so sends them and us to preach the Gospel to all nations, but walking with us as we fulfil this task.

The Resurrection, the Ascension and the Giving of the Spirit are all part of the same reality, but each needs to be reflected upon to help us take on board the richness of this insight. So let us take an example to help us enter fully into it.

Lech Walesa worked for years in the Gdansk shipyards as an electrician, during that time he set up the Solidarity movement, with colleagues, who eventually came into opposition with the communist authorities. Eventually they won the battle and so Poland returned to being a democracy. In December 1990, Lech was elected President of the country, something which would have been impossible previously. His colleagues were delighted for him, but there was also a feeling of sadness, in that their relationship with him would henceforth be different. As he wrote later about the visit he made to the shipyard, the day after his election: “I got choked up when I looked at the small metal locker where I used to store my tools. Workers in overalls, looking embarrassed, congratulated me. I was no longer one of them. I wanted them to understand that I knew how they felt. Shyly, they said, ‘We hope you will be able to change our lives, Mr President.’”

For Jesus and us, it is the same thing happening. He had not left the disciples, He had simply taken on a new role, He is now with His Father in glory and so He is closer than ever to them and in a better position to be able to help them. He is thus able to fulfil the final promise at the conclusion of the Gospel, because He is now united with God, He is present wherever God is present – and so everywhere! Just as the early disciples believed that Jesus still shared their lives and that death would mean being united with Him in glory forever, but in the meantime He is relying on them and us now to make sure that the Gospel is indeed preached everywhere.

Words based on the thoughts of St Augustine, may be of help to us here: “We are born and die in exile, as soon as we set sail on the great voyage of life, we begin our return. We spend our lives dreaming of a homeland we have never seen. Like homing birds that are released in a strange country, and know no rest until they return home, so it is with us. When we die, we do not so much go to God as return to Him. You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts will never rest until they rest in you.