

The Joy of the Gospel

Solemnity of the Ascension
of the Lord (May 17, 2015)

Proclaim the Gospel to Every Creature



Overview

This week we celebrate the Ascension of the Lord. Students will reflect on Christ's parting words to the Apostles and what these words mean for us today.

Directions:

1. Have students read the Gospel. Older students should also read the excerpts from *Evangelii Nunciandi* by Pope Paul VI
2. Have students complete and comprehension and critical thinking questions that follow the reading(s).
3. Have students reflect on how they can evangelize by sharing their own personal witness of how Christ has worked in their lives by completing the Exercise: *Sharing Your Personal Witness*

Answer Key

1. Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature.
2. Whoever believes and is baptized.
3. They will drive out demons, they will speak new languages. They will pick up serpents with their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not harm them. They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover. Priests still perform exorcisms; miracles are reported associated with the healing of diseases. We can read stories of modern day saints and miracles. We don't witness them as often more due to our own lack of faith and not because Jesus is not working.
4. We have a responsibility to share the Gospel with others. Jesus doesn't merely suggest that we go and share the Gospel with every creature; He commands that we do.
5. Evangelizing is what Jesus calls the Church to do. The Church exists to share the Gospel message and help people understand it. God's grace flows through the Church, and helps people return to Him. The Church re-presents Christ's sacrifice in the Holy Mass, which is the way we remember and make present again His death and resurrection.
6. Paul VI discusses the importance of evangelization. This Gospel passage re-counts Jesus' command for us to evangelize. This Gospel is the foundation for Paul VI's reflections.
7. The mission of the Church is evangelization. It is carried out through personal witness and preaching.
8. Accept reasoned answers.
9. Accept reasoned answers.
10. Accept reasoned answers.

Mark 16:15-20: Proclaim the Gospel to Every Creature

Jesus said to his disciples: "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned. These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will drive out demons, they will speak new languages. They will pick up serpents with their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not harm them. They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." So then the Lord Jesus, after he spoke to them, was taken up into heaven and took his seat at the right hand of God. But they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs.

Comprehension and Critical Thinking Questions

1. What is Jesus' parting command to His Disciples?
2. What does Jesus say someone must do in order to be saved?
3. What signs does Jesus say will accompany those who believe? How do we see these signs today? Why do you think we don't seem to see them very often?
4. Based on this week's Gospel, what is our responsibility as Christians?
5. Pope Paul VI said, "*Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. [The Church] exists in order to evangelize, that is to say, in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God, and to perpetuate Christ's sacrifice in the Mass, which is the memorial of His death and glorious resurrection.*" How would you put this quotation into your own words? What is the mission of the Church?

Excerpts from *Evangelii Nuntiandi* by Pope Paul VI

13. Those who sincerely accept the Good News, through the power of this acceptance and of shared faith therefore gather together in Jesus' name in order to seek together the kingdom, build it up and live it. They make up a community which is in its turn evangelizing. The command to the Twelve to go out and proclaim the Good News is also valid for all Christians, though in a different way. It is precisely for this reason that Peter calls Christians "a people set apart to sing the praises of God,"

those marvelous things that each one was able to hear in his own language. Moreover, the Good News of the kingdom which is coming and which has begun is meant for all people of all times. Those who have received the Good News and who have been gathered by it into the community of salvation can and must communicate and spread it.

14. The Church knows this. She has a vivid awareness of the fact that the Savior's words, "I must proclaim the Good News of the kingdom of God," apply in all truth to herself: She willingly adds with St. Paul: "Not that I boast of preaching the gospel, since it is a duty that has been laid on me; I should be punished if I did not preach it." It is with joy and consolation that at the end of the great Assembly of 1974 we heard these illuminating words: "We wish to confirm once more that the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church." It is a task and mission which the vast and profound changes of present-day society make all the more urgent. Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize, that is to say, in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God, and to perpetuate Christ's sacrifice in the Mass, which is the memorial of His death and glorious resurrection.

18. ... The Church evangelizes when she seeks to convert, solely through the divine power of the message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu which are theirs.

41. ...For the Church, the first means of evangelization is the witness of an authentically Christian life, given over to God in a communion that nothing should destroy and at the same time given to one's neighbor with limitless zeal. As we said recently to a group of lay people, "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses." St. Peter expressed this well when he held up the example of a reverent and chaste life that wins over even without a word those who refuse to obey the word. It is therefore primarily by her conduct and by her life that the Church will evangelize the world, in other words, by her living witness of fidelity to the Lord Jesus- the witness of poverty and detachment, of freedom in the face of the powers of this world, in short, the witness of sanctity.

42. Secondly, it is not superfluous to emphasize the importance and necessity of preaching. "And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher?... So faith comes from what is heard and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ." This law once laid down by the Apostle Paul maintains its full force today.

Preaching, the verbal proclamation of a message, is indeed always indispensable. We are well aware that modern man is sated by talk; he is obviously often tired of listening and, what is worse, impervious to words. [But] ... the word remains ever relevant, especially when it is the bearer of

the power of God. This is why St. Paul's axiom, "Faith comes from what is heard," also retains its relevance: it is the Word that is heard which leads to belief.

Extension Questions

6. What is the connection between the Gospel passage and the excerpt from *Evangelii Nuntiandi* by Pope Paul VI?
7. What is the mission of the Church? How is this mission carried out?
8. In *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), Pope Paul VI noted that our civilization had gone from being based on words to being based on images. Do you agree with this assessment? Have we become more or less dependent on images in the past 40 years? Do you agree with Pope Paul VI that words are still necessary, even if people are tired of listening? Explain.
9. What struck you or surprised you the most from Pope Paul VI's message? Explain.
10. What are some ways to practically live out the call from the readings in our own lives?

Application Activity: Sharing Your Personal Witness

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your preparations, and then consider the following:

- How your story relates to the topic at hand
- The one or two main points your story will illustrate
- Real and specific examples from your life
- The age and background of your audience
- The amount of time you've been given to present

I. Before my conversion (or a pivotal act of faith):

- A. What did my life revolve around the most? What was my source of security and happiness? Give specific examples.
- B. How did things begin to let me down? Why did I not experience the happiness that I expected? Concentrate on communicating the feeling of disappointment or emptiness.

II. When I relinquished control of my life and ran into the arms of Christ:

- A. When was the first time I really understood the truth in the message of the Gospel?
- B. Did I have a sudden conversion experience, or was it a gradual process?
- C. What were the final struggles that went through my mind just before I surrendered to Christ's call?
- D. Why did I finally lay my life at the feet of Jesus? Who or what influenced me?

III. After I turned to Christ:

- A. What are the specific changes that Jesus has made in my life? How have my motivations changed?
- B. How does Christ give me the happiness, security, and fulfillment that I sought before my conversion? Give a specific example.

Helpful Hints:

- A. Write the way you speak – make the testimony yours and use SPECIFIC instances from your life to illustrate your story.
- B. Practice over and over until you can share your story naturally. You should never need to refer to notes when giving your testimony, whether on a plane or in front of 500 people.
- C. Choose a theme and stick to your time limit.
- D. Have a compelling opening. You will engage or lose your audience within the first 30 seconds.