

Gospel ; Matt 28 16-20 . Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations....., and know that I am with you always.

You might remember that in my previous homily to you, I shared something of the vision of Archbishop Bathersby. He shares that same vision that is reflected in the Acts of the apostles today and in Matthew's Gospel , that we will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon us and we will be God's witnesses to the ends of the earth. Indeed we are given this divine commission to make disciples, to help people come into a relationship with Jesus Christ, to help them experience the communion of the Church, and help them see that God has a mission of them- to make the world a better place. In simple times this is a statement of his own theology emerging from our archdiocesan synod – Jesus , Communion , Mission - get to know Jesus and make him known, to build the communion of the Church, and engage in mission to a needy world.

We have offered to be a pilot parish, a pathfinder parish, to explore and test ways that we can welcome people into a relationship with Jesus and the communion of the Church. I'm sure when I preached about this a month ago there would have been some people who were wondering how we might do this - but actually across the four masses we received a whole host of suggestions of simple ways that we might become a more welcoming parish. Nevertheless I'm conscious that at an individual level there will be people who are concerned that they might find it difficult to engage in this particular mission. I'm sure some might be a little scared that this task is too much for them. I'm sure the disciples felt the same as they saw Jesus heading off into heaven.

I hope we can all take heart from today's Gospel story of the Ascension. It is a story of having hope in an uncertain future. You can imagine that the disciples had great joy and comfort in the presence of Jesus among them in the 40 days following the resurrection. They would have been looking forward to him leading them on, and establishing the kingdom, and then all of a sudden he tells them that he is leaving them , to carry-on the mission by themselves. Of course he adds that he won't leave them completely alone, he will give them his Holy Spirit to help them. A spirit of wisdom, spirit of knowledge, a spirit of power. The disciples would have wondered what that meant. But he didn't give them a choice in this - he gave them the mission and told them to get on with it. In a gentle way that's what Archbishop Bathersby wants us to do as well.

This is not a new mission for us. Many people in the parish have been and even continue to be working on this mission. But it is the great Co-mission of Jesus for us all. Jesus commissions us all to engage in this mission.

Some of us will remember a television series some years ago called Mission Impossible. It would start with the scene where a secret agent would receive a tape recorded voice telling him this is your mission if you choose to accept it. Of course the agent always received missions that would be considered impossible by normal standards and invariably the agent accepted each impossible mission and gave it his best shot. I don't doubt that it is going to be difficult for us to carry on the mission of Jesus in our secular society today, but for myself as a soldier of Christ this will be a mission that I embrace tightly and give myself to unreservedly – no matter how impossible or difficult it may seem. I challenge you to accept this mission too.

In the last couple of weeks I walked to the Kokoda track. I had been asked to accompany a number of friends I had gone through the Royal military College with some 35 years ago. Mind you, talking to some members in the parish who had already walked the track it was clear this was a difficult task. However , even so I think they must've walked it in the dry season because the task I found was much more difficult than I had ever imagined. It rained every day we were

on the track. Indeed on the first day we had to do an extra 20 km of walking through the mud just to get to the start point because the road was unable to get our trucks through. By the third day I felt utterly exhausted. I was wondering how I was going to complete the task in such adverse weather conditions. I'm pleased to say I did manage to complete the track with the help of my friends but also significantly the help of the Holy Spirit. I had a very strong sense of God being present in me and with me. I physically felt God giving me strength. As things turned out I was also invited to share reflections and lead prayers for our group at various sites along the track, and even had the privilege of leading an Anzac Day service at the sides of the battle at Isurava.. More than 700 people attended the service and I was able to share something about the spirit of Anzac and the spirit of Jesus, which sustained our men in the most difficult of circumstances in 1942. I had many opportunities to be with people, hear their story and share mine. That's all that witnessing requires.

The challenge to welcome back those people who have left us, no doubt may seem a daunting challenge. But we have the Holy Spirit to guide us in this. We have the Holy Spirit that will give us wisdom when we come together and consider this mission. We have the Holy Spirit that will be working in the hearts of the people God desires to welcome back into communion. We have the Holy Spirit helping facilitate the circumstances where we will get opportunities to share of our faith and hope and our experience of the Christian life.

Next Sunday we will celebrate Pentecost. We will celebrate and remind ourselves of the very real power of the Holy Spirit, which is God's personal presence with us. **We need to be utterly convinced of this.** He did not leave us alone, he sent his Holy Spirit to be our guide. His spirit gives us the power for this mission.

It is certainly my hope and prayer that our community will be re-energized for God's mission in the world through Archbishop Bathurst's invitation to us to welcome people back into the communion of the church. All of us know people who once participated in the life of this community. Some of us know people who never have had the experience of Christian community. We don't need to go looking for these people, the Holy Spirit will be touching their hearts and will bring them into contact with us. We might need to deepen the friendships we have with these people, before we even get to the point of inviting them to come to church. Of course we will need to make sure that when they do come, that they are appropriately welcomed. We will need to have programs available for people to learn or relearn about our faith. We will need to answer their questions including the difficult ones.

The message of Ascension is not so much that Jesus is leaving us. The message of Ascension is that Jesus wants us to step up and take the lead in living out his mission for the world. We are his witnesses in the world. We are the ones that get to go forth and make disciples, embracing others and sharing our faith and hope. Next week we will be reflecting more fully on the Holy Spirit. Fr Ray will preach at all the masses and I will be sharing at our annual inter church service at St Peter Chanel at 6.30 on Sun night. Please be a witness to the other churches by coming along and showing our desire for unity with them, and our great love for the Holy Spirit. God will bless unity – he rejoices in it.

If you agree to being a witness for Jesus, You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you for the tasks God gives you, and together we will make the world a better place.