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## Sunday, May 13, 2018 – The Ascension of the Lord

Acts 1:1-11 | Psalm 47:2-3, 6-7, 8-9 | Ephesians 1:17-23 -or- Ephesians 4:1-13 | Mark 16:15-20

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### GLANCING THOUGHTS

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In the Gospel Reading, before his ascension, Christ gives his disciples a last command: go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel. And he adds a list of things that will characterize those of his followers who obey this command: they will drive out demons, speak new languages, handle snakes safely, drink deadly things without harm, and heal the sick by the laying on of hands.

Why this list? Isn't it supposed to be just love that characterizes Christ's followers?

Well, I think of it this way.

When one of my children was traveling to Bangladesh, I made a list of dos and don'ts for him. It was a list intended to help keep him safe.

Finding housing with English speakers was on the list, so that there wouldn't be language problems. "Don't drink the water!" was definitely on the list, and so was "Stay away from people who are obviously sick!" The list finished with this prohibition: "Whatever you do, don't come into contact with the ground!" I know it sounds ridiculous; but hookworm is endemic in that part of the world, and you can get full of worms if

you let a body part with an open wound come into contact with infected ground.

You can see that what was on my list of things to worry about are on Christ's list of things not to worry about: language problems, deadly drinks, sicknesses, even snakes—well, hookworms, anyway (demons weren't on my list, but maybe they would have been if I could have thought of anything to say about them).

So the things on Christ's list are the things that you (or your mother) might worry about if you were traveling in dangerous places. Since Christ is commanding his followers to head out to all the world, maybe it is only fair of him to tell those who obey him that they don't need to worry about any of these things. Like a good mother, Christ has already thought about all these things for his traveling people, and in his mercy he has made provision for them all.

So here is one way to understand Christ's list of the things that characterize those who believe in Christ and obey him. Whatever roads the journey of their lives takes them on, the care of the Lord encompasses those who travel in his name.

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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- What would prompt the two men dressed in white suddenly to appear and say to the apostles, "Why are you standing there looking at the sky"? Jesus had just given his friends a big assignment, witnessing to the ends of the earth. What do you think this would consist of? Is there a message here for us?
- Does our maturing to "the full stature of Christ" imply some growing pains? Where is Christ most recognizable in your life? in your humility? gentleness? patience? in your caring for the poor and needy?
- Jesus said signs would accompany those who believed. Most of us will probably not be picking up serpents with our hands or drinking deadly things without being harmed. What kinds of signs might you see today when you or someone else proclaims the Gospel?

### FROM POPE FRANCIS

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"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." This could be the definition of evangelization. Pope Francis says that Jesus himself is the model of evangelization. How important is listening to people's needs in being a witness and evangelist for Christ?

*Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is nothing else than the culmination of the way he lived his entire life. Moved by his example, we want to enter fully into the fabric of society, sharing the lives of all, listening to their concerns, helping them materially and spiritually in their needs, rejoicing with those who rejoice, weeping with those who weep; arm in arm with others, we are committed to building a new world.*

~Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, ¶269, November 24, 2013

### LIVING THE READINGS

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- Consider what dangers and risks you face in "proclaim[ing] the gospel to every creature". In your prayers this week, ask God for the strength to face those dangers and risks with courage and strength.