

After attending a convention led by Billy Graham a woman wrote to him. “Dear Reverend Sir, after hearing your inspiring talk, I feel that God is calling me to preach the Gospel. But the trouble is that I have twelve children. What shall I do?” The televangelist replied: “Dear Madam, I am delighted to hear that God has called you to preach the Gospel. I am even more delighted to hear that He has already provided you with a congregation in your own home!”

Yes, most of us do not need to leave home to preach the Gospel but can do it at home. There could be enough members in your own family, among your extended family, at your workplace, among whom one could fulfill the missionary mandate given by Jesus to his disciples just before he ascended into heaven.

On this Feast of Ascension, Jesus is commanding the disciples to go and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.

The disciples were being trained by Jesus for three years. During this period, Jesus commissioned them with different tasks to do – they were asked to love another, they were asked to live community life by forgiving each other, they were asked to wash each other’s feet, they were asked to feed the hungry, etc. Among them all, the last one was his command to his disciples to go into the whole world and proclaim the good news.

“Go into the whole world
and proclaim the gospel to every creature.”

Jesus gives a command, not a suggestion or option. And we know a command needs to be obeyed. Going into the whole world was unthinkable for the Jewish mindset. They could not even imagine of going to the non-Jewish or pagan worlds like the Samaritans and other gentiles. Jesus is commanding his disciples to break the barriers of racism. Nationalism, casteism and other prejudices and biases against other people. This command equally applies to all of us for the people of this country where racism was practiced and upheld in the form of human slavery. Maybe we have not come out of this white supremacy mindset and racism. Recent attacks on people of Asian origins are some clear examples. We still have a long way to go.

In order to fulfill this last will of Jesus the Apostles went to all corners of the world to preach the Risen Lord and to proclaim the good news to the whole creation. St. Thomas travelled all the way to India. St. Paul visited many cities in his great missionary journeys. St. Peter and Paul were martyred in Rome. Later on, the missionaries from Europe went all over the world breaking all the barriers, to fulfil this last will. And just like the early Christians and the Apostles they faced oppositions, persecutions and even martyrdom. Even in my home diocese Belgian missionaries were attacked.

The Biblical accounts of the Ascension focus not so much on the details of the event as on the mission Jesus gave to his disciples. For example, in the accounts narrated in Luke and Acts, the Ascension took place in Jerusalem. In Matthew and Mark, on the other hand, the event occurred in Galilee. All accounts, however, agree that the Ascension, a real event, happening in real time, and observed by real people, took place on a mountain. In Luke and Acts, the Ascension happened forty days after the Resurrection, a period during which Jesus appeared repeatedly to his followers. In Matthew and Mark there is no indication of the time period between the Resurrection and the Ascension. The Gospel writers apparently were not aiming at accuracy of historical detail, for their concern was with transmitting Our Lord's message to all the world.

After the incident of Ascension, Jesus is no more present in this world in the physical human form. Today we are the ones who represent Jesus in this world. We are to continue the ministry and mission of Jesus which he gave to his disciples at ascension, "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature."

So how are we going to be witnesses of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth? By splendid churches, statues, pictures, distribution of bibles, preaching at the street corners etc. or what?

They are needed but not enough. We must proclaim and witness Christ by our life.

Seeing our kindness, compassion, readiness to share our time, talents, and treasures, fearlessness, smile, inner joy, and promptness to celebrate life, the world would realize Christ is resurrected! They will see presence of Christ. It is through our love they will know that we are Christians.

In my part of India, Lutheran missionaries from Germany came first. Their ministry was limited to preaching at the street corners and distribution of bibles. So, they were not successful. The Catholic missionaries, Jesuits from Belgium came later. But they were very successful because they helped the people in their needs to fight against racism, injustice and atrocities.

My diocese also is witnessing Christ in a Hindu majority country, through service to the poor and the needy through schools, health centers etc. The Church building is the last building to be built in a new parish.

So, try to fulfill the command of Jesus by witnessing him in your own place by a life of service to poor and the needy breaking all the barriers.