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Baptism **Seventh Sunday of Easter**

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19-20).

These words from the end of Matthew’s Gospel have echoed in the hearts of Christian believers since that day of Ascension. Our tradition calls these words the “Great Commission,” and they are important words for us to consider as we come to the final weeks of the Easter Season.

Matthew records these words as Jesus’ final instructions, so to speak. He is at the mountain with the Eleven, about to ascend to the Father. In this Ascension, which we celebrated this past Thursday, the Paschal Mystery is completed. Jesus returns to the Father, from whom he had come. The Father sends the Son into the world. Now, the mission of the Spirit will be to carry out through Jesus’ disciples what was carried out in the life of Jesus himself.

This Great Commission summarizes how we as faithful Catholic Christians are to extend Christ’s victory in our time and in our part of the world. Interestingly, it begins with the powerful word: “go.” At the end of Mass, the priest or deacon tells everyone to “Go forth,” or “Go in peace,” or “Go, and announce the Gospel of the Lord.” We “go” out of ourselves, sometimes out of our comfort zones. But we trust that we are sent by Christ and that we are buoyed up by the Spirit. This allows us to leave the friendly confines of the Liturgy to bring Christ’s message to the world.

This “go”-ing out leads to making disciples for Christ. A disciple is not one who is perfected. Rather, a disciple is a learner. We are all learners, right down to the Pope himself. We do not have to be perfect to help bring others to Christ. We just have to believe that the Gospel message is so important that it is the basis of the happiness we all seek in life.

The core of the message is Baptism. Jesus instructs the Eleven to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, a Tradition which has continued from the time of the Apostles to this very day. At the Easter Vigil this year, thousands of men and women all over the world received this sacrament. Over the course of the year, dozens of infants will be brought to our baptismal font here at St. Katharine’s to become new members of the family of God.

Pope Francis has emphasized the importance of baptism in the Christian life. Within our communities, baptism helps us to recognize our equality as members of the Body of Christ. Though I am the pastor and priest, and thus have a unique role because of the sacrament of Holy Orders, there is much more we have in common because of our baptism. The youngest infant, the newest convert, the person who does not come to Church – all of these share our common baptism. We must treat them all with reverence as brothers and sisters in Christ. When we build

each other up, that's what we are doing: helping each other live out our baptism with greater fervor. Hopefully when I preach to you, each of you leaves energized to live your baptismal call.

Baptism also unites us with our brothers and sisters who share our Christian faith but are not in full communion with the Catholic Church. I am sure that all of us know Protestants or Orthodox Christians. Though it is important to recognize our disagreements in the name of honest dialogue, we can never forget the Baptism which unites us all. How beautiful it is to think that even over hundreds of years of separation, God manages to draw us all together through this sacrament! Whether it is the Jesuit missionary in the hills of Paraguay or the elderly vicar in an Anglican chapel in London, they are both living out the Great Commission.

It is critical that we do everything we can to achieve true reconciliation. For many of us, this can mean working together with other Christians in service to the poor. Pro-life organizations have brought Christians of various denominations together for decades now, a silver lining in the midst of the horrible scourge of abortion. Even among our fellow Catholics, we should never focus solely on the things that separate us. Our common baptism makes us one!

How could we ever expect to live out this Great Commission? The last words should answer that question for us in a definitive way: "And behold, I am with you always, until the close of the age" (Mt 28:20). ~Rev. Eric J. Banecker