

Homily – Fr. Brad Neely
Ascension Sunday – Cycle A
Peter and Paul; Nezperce: – Jun 04, 2011
Acts 1: 1-11; Eph 1: 17-23; Mt 28: 16-20

Today's Gospel is from Matthew.
Matthew is very much the Scripture author
who wants to emphasize Jesus
belonging to the long line of Jewish
generations
pointing to the One Who is the awaited
Messiah.

For a moment, let's go
to the very first chapter of Matthew,
where we note what he tells us
after the genealogy of Jesus.
Matthew tells the story of His birth: [Mt.
18b]

*"When his mother Mary was betrothed to
Joseph,
but before they lived together,
she was found with child through the Holy
Spirit."*

*"All this took place in order
that what was spoken by the Lord
through the prophet might be fulfilled.
'Behold the virgin will be with child
and bear a son,
and they will call his name 'Emmanuel'*

We know that the name Emmanuel
means: "**God with us**" [Mt 1: 22-23].

Given this, let's go
to the last verse in today's Gospel passage
from chapter 28.

Jesus tells the 11 remaining apostles,
*"And behold, **I am with you until the end of
the age.**"*

He could really have said,
"And behold I am **Emmanuel**
until the end of the age."

Since chapter 28 is the last one
in Matthew's Gospel,
we are given "bookends" or "brackets" of
sorts,

between the *child Emmanuel* in the first
chapter,
and *Jesus "with us" until the end of the age*
in the last chapter.

"**God with us,**" who was born of Mary,
tells his disciples before promising
to be with them until the end of the age,
to: *"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all
nations,*

baptizing them. . . .

*[and] teaching them to observe all
that I have commanded you."*

Jesus definitively left the disciples with a
mission.

This is quite different than if He had said,
"It's been fun knowing you
and being with you---
maybe we can get together for lunch
sometime
when our paths cross again."

No, Jesus does not deliver
a happenstance of lunch sometime,
but **gives a mission.**

After this, "Emmanuel--God with us,"
and "Emmanuel---I am with you until the
end of the age "
ascends to heaven.

Can we really imagine
what the disciples might have been
thinking?

He says He is "with us,"
but is "leaving us,"---for the **second** time!
We can't be sure
how completely the disciples understood
what was to happen,
given these seemingly mixed signals.

We, today, have the benefit
of 2000 years of retrospection.
It's clear to us in looking back,
that **Jesus ascended bodily into heaven,
so that His spirit may be poured upon the
earth.**

Let's add another dimension to this.

Remember that in our first reading from the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, we hear the author Luke address the writing to Theophilus, the same Theophilus to whom he wrote his Gospel.

I've mentioned before, that historically, we do not know if Theophilus was a real person, but we **do know** what the name Theophilus means:

Theophilus means: "Those who love God."

Luke, in this passage, proceeds to tell "those who love God," that Jesus met with his disciples "before he was taken up," and told them to wait for the "*promise of the Father about which [they] had heard [Him] speak; for John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.*"

And as the disciples looked on, "he was lifted up, and a cloud took him from their sight."

So:

1)-- Jesus Christ Emmanuel---"God with us," commissions his disciples and says, "I am with you until the end of the age."

2)-- Before he was taken up, Jesus told his disciples to *wait* for the promise of the Father— "*in a few days you will be **baptized** with the Holy Spirit.*"

We know that the original Greek word used in Scripture for **baptize**, means, "to plunge into---to immerse ourselves."

So, through the promise of the heavenly Father, Christ is with us until the end of the age by immersing us with the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit, **within** Whom we immerse ourselves--- is One of the Three Persons, inseparable, of the Holy Trinity--- and **is** how **God is with us**--- until the end of the age.

[*Not to be outdone by Deacon Don*], I have an assignment for you this week. Thinking *as we are able* in the mind of God, what advantages are there for Christ the Son to ascend bodily into heaven, after which we receive the outpouring of He and the Heavenly Father's divine Spirit upon the world? Next week, we celebrate that outpouring in **Pentecost**.