



Family Connections

Feast of the Ascension (Year B)



Mark 16: 15 – 20

Jesus appeared to the eleven, and he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.”

So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it.



Reflection:

To love someone is a choice. We choose to spend time with them, share our lives with them, listen to their concerns and do things with them. The same is true in our relationship to God; we can choose to respond to his invitation or not. God promises that, for those who choose to live their lives as his followers, he will be there with signs of healing and protection.



Table Discussion (at mealtime):

Respond to the following statement: “It is not always easy to love someone.”



St. Teresa of Avila (a bedtime story):

As a child, Teresa loved hearing the stories of the early saints who were killed for following Christ. So taken up by the idea of becoming a martyr herself, seven year old Teresa, together with her eleven year old brother, ran away from home to die at the hands of the Moorish people. When this plan was scuttled by her uncle, the two of them decided to live the lives of hermits instead.

After a few years of getting caught up with romance novels and worldly friends, dressing up and concern about her appearance, she was sent to a local school for well-to-do young women. Here she regained a greater sense of prayer and direction.

Like many of the saints, Teresa fell ill for a period of time. And, as has been the case in the lives of many of the saints, her illness led to a closer relationship to God. By the time she regained her health, she decided to become a nun and to give her life to God alone.

Teresa faced many battles throughout her life, including a life-long battle with the nuns with whom she lived. They began to dislike Teresa because Teresa believed that they were too concerned with material possessions, what their friends thought of them and their relationships with the outside world. Because Teresa was working towards significant changes in their community's life, she was being accused by her fellow nuns for not being true to the Catholic Faith in her beliefs and in the way she prayed. Their accusations were even sent to the local bishop and to the Church's Courts.

Teresa continued to receive support from the priests to whom she went for spiritual advice. These same priests instructed her to keep a detailed diary of all her spiritual insights and all the struggles she had to undergo. These same writings have become a great treasure to the Church, for in Teresa's writings we get a better idea of what a close relationship with God looks like.

In her writings, Teresa speaks of a relationship with God that grows. "The closer you grow to God", she says, "the more of your life is focused on him". One day as she was praying before the cross, she became aware of how she had so much and Christ had so little. Troubled by this comparison, she wanted to strip her life of things she did not need, including the shoes she wore. When she started setting up small religious communities of nuns that focused on their relationship to Christ alone, they were called "discalced", a word that means "without footwear".

One day, as Teresa was travelling between two of her community of nuns, she was thrown off her donkey. Mad at herself, and at the animal, she looked up to heaven and said, "If you treat your friends this way, no wonder you have so many enemies." But, deep inside she knew, the sufferings that come our way are the very way we come to understand the sufferings of Christ, thereby loving him more and more.

It is obvious from her writings and life story, that Teresa loved God very much. Though she suffered much from illness and at the hands of those who opposed her, she is known for her close relationship to God. She leaves you with this prayer:

Let nothing disturb you. Let nothing make you afraid.
All things are passing. God alone never changes.
Patience gains all things.
If you have God you will want for nothing.
God alone suffices.

Incredible Signs (a bedtime reflection):

Jesus' promise to the Apostles, at the end of Mark's Gospel, contains a number of incredible signs. The casting out of demons, the healing of the sick, the handling of poisonous snakes and the drinking of deadly things, all while ministering to the world in Jesus' name, seems too good to be true. Though God does not want us to test by doing any of these things on purpose, Jesus assures us of his protection when we dedicate our lives to doing his work.

Here are but a few ways God was true to his promise:

- At Pentecost, The Apostles speak in many different languages (Acts 2: 1- 13).
- The Apostles heal many ((Acts 5: 12 – 16).
- St. Peter brings Tabitha back to life (Acts 9: 36 – 42).
- St. Peter was rescued from jail. (Acts 12: 6 – 11).
- St. Paul heals a man crippled from birth (Acts 14: 8 – 10).
- St. Paul survives a stoning (Acts 14: 19 – 20).
- St. Paul and Silas are rescued from jail (Acts 16: 16 – 34).
- St. Paul is saved from a shipwreck (Acts 27: 39 – 44).
- St. Paul survives a deadly snake bite (Acts 28: 1 – 6).
- A number of the early Christians were only killed after many failed attempts to do so. (stories from the early martyrs.)
- Many are the stories of Saints and holy persons survived poisonings and attempts to kill them because of the work they were doing (St. John Bosco).
- Other Saints and holy persons were protected under very dangerous conditions. (Bishop Vital Grandin's near-death experience while traversing Great Slave Lake in a Winter storm on foot in the 1800's).
- Five weeks ago, I shared two of my own stories, where God saved me from an accident that was about to happen (in my car and on my bicycle). He also saved me from a roll-over when I was working with the Dene people up North and an electrocution when I was a child.

You may even have your own stories of how has God protected you from harm, healed you from some terrible illness or kept you safe to the present day. You may even hear the stories of how God protected, healed or rescued others. I strongly believe that God shows us these signs so that we may grow in our love and trust in him.



Miracles Today:

People are healed from all kinds of illnesses each day. Some of these healings have no medical explanation. We call those healings "Miracles".

Many people pray for miracles when faced with incurable illnesses. Some will ask that their prayers be supported by a certain Saint or Holy Person. St. Andre Bessette, from Montreal, was known as someone whose prayers led to many cures.



St. Andre Bessette (a bedtime story):

“In sending you this man,” Andre Bessette’s parish priest wrote in a letter, “I’m sending you a Saint.” And, with these words of introduction, he sent Andre to the Congregation of the Holy Cross in Montreal, so that they might accept him as one of their own.

But, no matter how good the words in the letter were, they were not good enough for the Superior, who refused to accept Andre as a member. After all, Andre Bessette was weak and sickly and didn’t have much schooling. “We are a community of teachers,” he reasoned. “We operate schools and universities. How much use can this man be to us?”

In his second attempt to get them to accept Andre, his parish priest turned to the bishop of Montreal. “Surely, they would listen to him,” he thought. And this they did. “We’ll accept him as our doorkeeper,” the Superior said. And so that’s what Brother Andre did for the rest of his life. He once joked: “When I joined this community, the Superior showed me the door, and I remained there for 40 years.”

But Brother Andre was no ordinary doorkeeper. He would take time to pray with everyone who was open to the idea. People began coming to him with their problems, their difficulties and their illnesses. Brother Andre took the time to pray with all of them.

Not only that, people were beginning to experience unexplained healings. As more and more people began to hear these reports, more and more people came to Brother Andre for prayer.

His Superior was not happy. “This is a well-respected college,” he complained. “We have staff and students to think about. We can’t have half of Montreal show up at our door. It just isn’t safe.” When, later that year, an illness spread through the streets of Montreal, and the people came running to Brother Andre for prayer, his Superior finally said, “No, this cannot go on. It isn’t safe for our students and our staff.”

Brother Andre was given permission to pray with the sick in a nearby tram station at the end of his day as doorkeeper. By this time, the news of the miraculous healings was so widespread, that he rarely had a moment to himself.

“I do not heal anyone,” Brother Andre used to say. “I turn to Christ through the prayers of St. Joseph. It is he who is responsible for the healings you see.”

In order to make his point, Brother Andre decided to build a small church to St. Joseph on top of the hill where the College stood. After serving 40 years as doorkeeper, he asked for permission to move into a little apartment that was part of the church in order to carry out his healing ministry there.

The little church was too small for all the people that came, and soon the people were planning to build a bigger church. When that church was finished, an even bigger church was needed. By the time Brother Andre died, the Church was so big, you could see it from almost anywhere in Montreal.

If you go to Montreal today, you cannot miss it. St. Joseph’s Oratory towers above the city of Montreal. Many people still go there today for healing. Against its giant inner walls, thousands of crutches are left standing; they represent the thousands of people that came for healing, leaving their crutches behind. If you want to see what St. Joseph’s Oratory looks like, the church St. Andre Bessette built, you can check it out on the internet.