

ASCENSION HOMILY: CYCLE B
GOSPEL: Mark 16: 15-20
GRADUATION MASS
5/16/21
BY FR. MIKE

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One of our little kids came up to me last weekend and said, “Fr. Mike, guess what’s going to happen to me next week?”

Is it going to be your birthday I asked?

Noooooo said the little girl, I am graduating from kindergarten!

Do you remember when you graduated from kindergarten?

My encounter with Ana, made me wonder how many graduation ceremonies I have been through? I counted seven.

1. Kindergarten
2. 8th grade
3. High school
4. My AA degree from the Community College in St Petersburg
5. My BA in Philosophy
6. My Masters in Divinity
7. My Second Master in Church Management

All of these ceremonies had one thing in common: commencement speeches!

I am embarrassed to tell you; **I can’t remember any of them.**

There is one commencement speech you and I need to remember. In our first reading and our Gospel, what is Jesus doing for his apostles? Jesus is giving them a “commencement speech “. The apostles are about to graduate! He is giving them final instructions on what to do as his Church.

Their commencement speech is also meant for you and me. In fact, it was so important that Luke and Mark, wrote it down so we wouldn’t forget it after we graduated.

In our first reading, Jesus instructs the apostles: *“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my **WITNESSES**, and you will be my witnesses, in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.”* (AA 1:8)

Jesus is about to physically leave them but through his Holy Spirit he will REMAIN with his church. But through his Holy Spirit, he will REMAIN with his church.

Jesus did not abandon them after his ascension. Jesus did not leave them to defend themselves after his ascension.

Instead, Jesus promised to send them his Holy Spirit and next week, we celebrate this coming of his Spirit with the feast of Pentecost.

This week he is giving them their commencement speech. Next week we see them graduating.

After three years of teaching and instructing his apostles and how to pray, study, serve, form community, and evangelize, Jesus is now sending them out to do what he has been training them to do: **TO BE HIS WITNESSES**, to be his church.

When I was a young boy, before being allowed to go over to a neighbor's house to play, I had to pass my mother's inspection. She had to make sure I was dressed appropriately, and I had brushed my teeth. Finally, she would Emphatically say: "**Michael, remember you are an O'Brien**". I knew what that meant to be an O'Brien. It meant that I had to act in a certain way: If I burped, I had to say excuse me. I had to Respond to adults with, "yes ma'am and no sir." And I **ALWAYS** had to say, "please and thank you."

In our first reading, right before his Ascension, Jesus is doing the same thing to his disciples. Jesus is reminding his church; that is you and me, that we are to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. It is like what my mom always said to me, before going out the door: "**Michael, remember you are an O'Brien**", which meant I had to behave in a certain way.

Jesus is saying the same thing to us: "**REMEMBER CHURCH, YOU ARE NOW REPRESENTING ME TO THE WORLD! ACT ACCORDINGLY.**"

In today's Gospel, right before ascending into heaven, Jesus is telling his church what kind of WITNESSING he wants us to do: "*Go into the world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature.*" (Mark 16:15) I remember seeing a poster, that said "**YOU MIGHT BE THE ONLY GOSPEL ANOTHER PERSON EVER GETS TO READ.**"

Graduates\Church, for Saint Clement, the part of the world we are responsible for is Plant City! For Saint Clement to fulfill our share of Jesus's commencement speech and to be his witnesses, **we need to remember what he has taught us.**

You **may** have already forgotten the quadratic formula, the 50 state Capitals, how to conjugate the verb GO in French or Spanish or how to read the Periodic Table. To be effective witnesses of Jesus and his church, we need to REMEMBER & PRACTICE the main lessons Jesus taught us on how to be his disciples!

Graduates of the class of 2021 it has been:

1. 63 years since my graduation from kindergarten
2. 55 years since my graduation from middle school
3. 51 years since my graduation from high school
4. 48 years since my graduation from my community college in St Petersburg with my AA degree
5. 46 years since my graduation with my BA degree in philosophy
6. 43 years since my graduation with my Masters in Divinity
7. 10 years, since my second Masters in church Management

I have learned a lot and forgotten a lot, since all my graduations. In our Gospel, Jesus is calling you and me to be his witnesses **and to be effective witnesses of Jesus and his church, we need to remember what Jesus taught us on how to be a Disciple.**

I have a question for you to answer, not right now, but between now and the feast of Pentecost, which is next week, I want you to ponder the following:

“What is the most important lesson Jesus has taught you about being his disciple, that you need to always remember?”

Let me repeat that:

“What is the most important lesson Jesus has taught you about being his disciple, that you need to always remember?”

In Jesus’s commencement speech to his apostles, he is reminding them, that they are to be his witnesses. It is like what my mom would say to me before I went outside to play. “Michael remember you are an O’Brien.”

Graduates/Church, our world is drowning in a sea of WORDS. All sorts of words and messages flood or social platforms every day. Everyone is giving us their opinion.

Jesus knew that our world needed disciples who could do MORE than just **TALK** the **TALK**. That is why he wanted his disciples to be WITNESSES of his Gospel. Jesus wanted Disciples who could **WALK** the **TALK**.

Graduates/ Church, “Talk is cheap today”, being a witness of the gospel of Jesus involves not only what you say but how you live the gospel; 24/7; 365, whether you are in church or outside church. That is why I want you to ponder the question:

“What is the most important lesson Jesus has taught you about being his disciple, that you need to always remember?”

You might come up with more than one lesson like I have, but there is one lesson that is foundational to me. One lesson that I learned when I was 19 years old, that has become the cornerstone of my discipleship.

The Evangelist Luke describes the lesson this way in chapter 11 verse one of his Gospel, *“Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he had finished, one of his disciples said to him: Lord teach us to pray “.*

Of all the lessons Jesus has taught me, this one has proven to be the most critical for my life. By having a prayer time with God every day, I have been able to navigate a variety of life experiences that span from the death of my parents to challenges, opportunities, doubts, disappointments, setbacks, valleys, and Peak moments.

Graduates of 2021\Church next week is our graduation. Pentecost is when we get our diplomas and head out into the world as **WITNESSES** of Jesus and his church.

Today is our commencement speech. Today, Jesus is reminding us that all our training and all our formation has been preparing us to be his **WITNESSES**.

As my mother would always say to me as I went out the door “Michael, remember you are an O’Brien.” Jesus is doing the same thing. BEFORE sending us out into the WORLD, JESUS is REMINDING you and me: **WE ARE TO BE HIS WITNESSES!!!**

Graduates\Church, to be affective **WITNESSES**, you and I need to remember those important lessons that Jesus has been teaching us, so we can not only **TALK** the **TALK**, but be able to **WALK the TALK, AS HIS WITNESSES**.

Amen?

Amen!