Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord (C)

Gospel text (*Lk* 24:46-53): Jesus said to his disciples: “Thus it is written that the Christ would suffer and rise from the dead (…). You are witnesses of these things (…).

Then he led them out as far as Bethany, raised his hands, and blessed them. As he blessed them he parted from them and was taken up to heaven. They did him homage and then returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and they were continually in the temple praising God.

The Ascension: invitation to be in communion with Jesus, invisibly present

EDITORIAL TEAM evangeli.net (based on texts by Benedict XVI)
(Città del Vaticano, Vatican)

Today's Solemnity of the Ascension invites us to be in profound communion with the dead and Risen Jesus, invisibly present in the life of each one of us.

In this perspective we understand why the Evangelist Luke says that after the Ascension the disciples returned to Jerusalem "with great joy". Their joy stems from the fact that what had happened was not really a separation, the Lord's permanent absence: on the contrary, they were then certain that the Crucified-Risen One was alive and that in him God's gates, the gates of eternal life, had been opened to humanity for ever. In other words, his Ascension did not imply a temporary absence from the world but rather inaugurated the new, definitive and insuppressible form of his presence by virtue of his participation in the royal power of God.

It was to be up to them, the disciples emboldened by the power of the Holy Spirit, to make his presence visible by their witness, preaching and missionary zeal.

The mission of the Church after the Ascension: to proclaim Christ present among us

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Today, the Lord's Ascension must also fill us with serenity and enthusiasm, just as it did the Apostles who set out again "with great joy". Like them, we too, accepting the invitation of the "two men in dazzling apparel", must not stay gazing up at the sky, but, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit must go everywhere and proclaim the saving message of Christ's Resurrection.

The historical character of the mystery of Christ's Resurrection and Ascension helps us to recognize and

understand the transcendent condition of the Church which was not born and does not live to compensate for the absence of her Lord who has "disappeared" but on the contrary finds the reason for her existence and mission in the invisible presence of Jesus, a presence working through the power of his Spirit.

—The Church does not carry out the role of preparing for the return of an "absent" Jesus, but, on the contrary, lives and works to proclaim his "glorious presence" in a historical and existential way.