

**Homily for May 12, 2002
Solemnity of the Ascension of
the Lord Cycle A**

By Father Charles Bowes

**Acts 1:1-11
Ephesians 1:17-23
Matthew 28:16-20**

While the disciples looked up, they lost their Head, and lost their heads, too – to be replaced by the Spirit.

The artisans of the cathedrals of Europe could employ their most junior apprentices in crafting a depiction of the Ascension of Jesus. In many old churches, if you look far up to the top ridge of the ceiling, you can find a series of carvings representing key events in the life of Jesus – the Annunciation, the birth, the public life, the death, the Resurrection...but when the carvers got to the Ascension, their task was easy. All they had to do was carve the bottoms of Jesus' feet, because the rest of him had been swallowed up by Heaven. Feet were a lot easier to draw than faces – hence the junior craftsman could be employed in that work. In other words, the disciples lost their Head – they no longer could see the visible Jesus – he became smaller and smaller, the tradition says. A cloud intervened, and he was gone. With his change, it was as if all the doors of Heaven that had been opened over the last thirty-some-odd years had closed again. Curtains were drawn. Shutters rattled down. Lights went out. His disciples lost their Head, and losing their Head, they lost their heads, too.

They were dazzled. They remained looking. They were paralyzed, petrified on the spot.

But Jesus in his otherness, being one person among many, became transformed into the bodiliness of each of us – Jesus came to the world now through our humanity – through the disciple's humanity from age to age.

And in order to be a disciple, we need merely ask a question and then allow the natural to take over – which is a momentary posture of listening: “Lord, what was it like to wonder what to do next? How did you handle confusion, puzzlement, uncertainty?” In this way, Jesus is our gateway through which the Father comes to us and we go to the Father.

In this way also we become the messengers, the evangelizers, however responding in our current city for

the Billy Graham Mission – in four quite specific ways our parish has embraced: by means of choirs – young and old; prayer for one another; engagement of our youth; and by deeds of social justice. To explain these more fully I've invited Mr. Jack Maisel.

Today, I'd like to tell you what we as a Parish have already been doing to prepare for the Billy Graham Mission which will be on the last weekend in June. Also, I'd like to tell you what we're going to start doing.

So far, the response from our Parishioners has been wonderful. Nearly 100 of you have been attending the five-week Christian Life and Witness Course put on by the Billy Graham folks. Young people just 13 years-old all the way to old people like me have been going each week. And you know what? They like it! Some are even going twice a week to hear the same thing again. It's that good.

As for the upcoming Mission in June, our Parish is already preparing for a number of our kids to participate. On Saturday morning, June 29, they'll be invited to the Billy Graham Kidz Gig. Sister Laura is lining up kids to sing in the 2000-voice, sing-along children's choir. Parents of OLR school kids and parents of the school of religious education kids are being informed about the Kidz Gig. There's a sheet of information about this in the back of the church. Sister Laura is looking for adult volunteers who'll accompany our kids to the event. Please contact her if you're interested in helping out.

As for our teenagers and young adults, our Youth Minister, Dave Nissen, is taking a number of them down to Paul Brown Stadium a week before the Mission to join other young people. Hand-in-hand, everyone will be surrounding the stadium in prayer for the success of the Mission. And then, on Saturday night of the Mission, June 29, there's a special concert for teens and young adults.

Dave is taking a number of young people there. I'm told it's going to be a blast. After the concert, Billy Graham will speak especially to those young people.

Another component of our Billy Graham involvement is called Love-In-Action. With assistance from the St. Vincent DePaul Society, we will help feed the hungry in our own community and also in the inner city. We plan on doing this by collecting and distributing non-perishable food items from you, and then distributing the food to those in need. Sister Laura is even involving the grade school kids in this Love-In-Action effort of giving.

We won't be waiting until the Mission to distribute this food. We're going to be doing it now! There are very specific food items to be included, and we have special Billy Graham bags. On each bag, we plan to have a personalized invitation from OLR to attend the Billy Graham Mission. We'll even be offering transportation to the Mission to those people receiving food.

At the doors when you leave, people will be on hand to give you the special bags and the list of specific foods to be purchased. We need the filled bags back within two weeks, no later than May 26. Please return the bags at the Parish Activity Center.

When I spoke with you a month ago, I told you about a special prayer effort called Friend-To-Friend. I felt then and still feel today that it's the most important thing you and I can do for the Billy Graham Mission. 80% of the people who go to a Billy Graham Mission have been personally invited by somebody else. There are people you know who will not go to the Mission if you don't invite them. Friend-To-Friend is really just a tool to help you bring to mind who you might want to pray for and invite to the Mission. There are extra Friend-To-Friend cards in the pew, and special versions for young adults and kids by each door.

I'm sure every single one of you knows somebody who may be personally touched by Billy Graham's message. We all probably have family members, friends, neighbors and co-workers who no longer go to church or are struggling in some way. They may not be open to coming back to Mass with you, but they may be willing to go with you to hear Billy Graham just one evening. Sometimes we Catholics equate going to a mission as

attending three or four nights in a row. For the Billy Graham Mission, you only have to attend one evening.

Remember when I started off by saying nearly 100 of you have been attending the five-week Christian Life and Witness Course? These people are being equipped to serve as counselors at the Mission. They're also being equipped to minister to those people you've invited to the Mission AFTER the Mission is over. Just days after the Mission is over, OLR will be offering a special seven-week Bible Study to help Mission participants grow in their faith and connect with a church. Pray that the friends on your list will end up in the pews beside you at OLR. All this will be provided by our own folks right here at OLR!

In summary, there's been a lot of enthusiasm about the Mission so far. Kids will be having fun at the kids' event, and they'll be helping collect food for the needy in the meantime.

The teens and young adults will be surrounding the stadium in prayer a week ahead of time, and then will be attending the Saturday night concert during the Mission.

OLR kids and adults have been signing up to participate in the Mission choirs. Other adults are signing up as Mission ushers. The deadline for these is May 15.

The Love-In-Action project to feed the hungry of Cincinnati is happening now. Receive a bag at the door as you leave. Please fill the bag and return it within two weeks.

And, our Parish will be providing a follow-up ministry after the Mission for those people we've invited to the Mission.

Still, the most important piece of all is you inviting someone else to go. Use that Friend-to-Friend card as a tool. Understand that this may end up being a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for some important person in your life. God knows how it may change their life.

So there you have it. Our Parish community is doing a lot in preparation for the Mission. It all begins with your prayer. Pray daily for the persons you're thinking about inviting. Ask the Lord to open up the opportunity for you to invite them to go with you to the Billy Graham Mission. Pray that the Mission will be successful in healing our city, and that our Parish will continue to be actively involved, bringing many people home.