

My friends as most of you know, I was away these past 10 days with a small group on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and one of the beauties of being there is the way the scriptures come to life. The words of Jesus, his parables, his actions take on a new form when you are able to walk along the shores of the Sea of Galilee, visit Nazareth, Bethlehem, Capernaum, and Jerusalem. When you see the Judean desert and the river Jordan, the Word of God comes alive. But of course you can't stay there you have to come home and hopefully there is something that you can take with you that gives one's faith new meaning, focus and attention.

Today we come to the feast of the Ascension which means the Easter Season is almost finished. Next Sunday we will celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the Easter candle will be returned to its place by the baptismal font. Now at the Ascension what do we see? We see Jesus going up to heaven, to return to the Father from whom he came. But we also see the call to move on. Men of Galilee why are looking up to heaven? This Jesus whom you have known, followed and loved is going back to the Father until he returns to the judge the living and the dead.

So now what? It is time to go to work, the mission is yours. You must proclaim what you have seen. You must give testimony to God's deeds that you have witnessed. You must announce that Jesus is risen from the dead. But how do we do that?

Again going back to my time in the Holy Land, on Wednesday this past week I presided at Mass at the Notre Dame Guest house in Jerusalem and the first reading that day came from the Acts of the Apostles and it described St. Paul's encounter with the Athenians at the Aeropagus. As

you read the Acts of the Apostles a key moment in the story is Paul's move out of Asia Minor and into Greece, bringing the Gospel to Europe. So Paul goes to the centre of intellectual debate and inquiry, Athens. The Aeropagus is a big rock at the base of the Parthenon and it was there that the Athenians would gather to hear new ideas, to debate and discuss philosophy. But as St. Paul tries to reason with them he has mixed success. He argued well but the philosophers had a bit of a problem with the idea of the Resurrection from the dead. He did not win many converts.

As I preached in Jerusalem, I asked the question of the people, most of whom were pilgrims, "What moved you in the Holy Land?" The tour guide's explanations, the teachings you received, the brilliant homilies you heard? Not likely, the sights, the sounds, the landscape, the tangible connection to the Word of God stirred the heart and the soul sealed an image on the mind; those things drew you closer to God.

So how will we be converted? When we get the right explanation and it all makes sense? Or maybe it occurs when we allow love to touch our hearts. When we allow the Holy Spirit to touch our souls. When we experience the living Jesus risen from the dead as opposed to God simply being a notion that has nothing to do with life.