



## BENEDICTINE SISTERS OF CHICAGO

Feast of the Ascension  
May 17, 2026  
Sr. Susan Quaintance

Acts 1:1-11  
Psalm 47:2-3, 6-7, 8-9  
Ephesians 1:17-23  
Matthew 28:16-20

I've never been a big fan of the Ascension. I know that is kind of a blasphemous thing to say, but it's true. As a friend from Fourth Presbyterian Church used to point out, the Ascension is weird. Even though it's a high feast, it's not like Christmas or Easter. We don't have Ascension parties or put up Ascension decorations or send Ascension cards. You may have noticed that, in this liturgy, we are singing two-thirds of the Ascension hymns in the Music Issue. And most of all, I can never get past how profoundly sad the disciples must have been. (I'm probably projecting onto the disciples there. I would have been profoundly sad.) They lost Jesus at the Crucifixion and had gotten him back at the Resurrection. Imagine that joy! Now, he leaves again. They must have felt so abandoned. Now I know that without the Ascension, we don't get Pentecost (which I love) . . . but still.

Spending some time with this Year A gospel that Fr. Mike just proclaimed helped. It's Matthew 28:16-20, the very end of the gospel. It comforted me, piqued my curiosity, and reminded me of something pretty basic that I can lose sight of all too easily.

Comfort. Verse 17 – which like all of you, I've heard a million times – this time stopped me short when I really paid attention. It says, "When they saw him, they worshipped but they doubted." Standing next to, or in front of, in-the-flesh Jesus, they doubted. In the middle of worship, they doubted. So that made me feel a whole lot better about those questions or misgivings I have on any random day. If Jesus's closest friends doubted, maybe it's not all that surprising (or awful) when I do, too.

Curiosity. You probably remember that even though the gospel of Matthew appears first in the Second Testament, it wasn't written first. That distinction belongs to the gospel of Mark that was probably written a good decade before Matthew, and from which Matthew took much of his material in his telling of the Jesus story. So it's pretty significant when he leaves something out – which is what he does here. Mark 16:19 notes Jesus being taken up into Heaven, but Matthew doesn't. He includes the commission of Mark 14:16 but omits what comes next. What was that about? Was Matthew as weirded out by the Ascension as I am?

Probably not. The more likely answer is that the author left out the flashy strangeness of the Ascension to put all the spotlight on Jesus's last words to the disciples: in Matthew, called the Great Commission (which Belinda spoke about so powerfully in her American Benedictine Forum presentation – and which, left to my own devices, I can forget to focus on). He tells the 11 (I also love that this passage doesn't sugarcoat the reality of Judas's absence) that they are to go make disciples – by baptizing and by teaching. That's what I'm supposed to do, too – in, as Belinda pointed out, the ways that I can, with the gifts that I have been given, in the situations where I find myself. The very last sentence of the gospel is the best of all: "And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age." As hard as it gets, as off-track as I can wander, Jesus does not abandon me. Or you. Even when the evidence seems to the contrary.

That, indeed, is good news.