

## Ascension Day message

*By the Most Rev. Archbishop Anne Germond*

“You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth.”

— Acts 1:8



### **You are my witnesses!**

Happy Ascensiontide, friends!

What on earth does it mean to be a witness?

As we mark the Feast of the Ascension, we celebrate the enthronement of Jesus at the right hand of God the Father.

In the first-century world, when someone was enthroned as a king, heralds or messengers were

sent to the far reaches of the kingdom to announce the name of the new king and to demand allegiance to that king from his subjects.

Last weekend, I had the joy of being the chief consecrator of the 11th Bishop of Ottawa, Kathryn Otley. The bishops of the Church gathered with me to lay hands on her head. Once the beautiful prayer of consecration was said, she was installed, or enthroned, in her cathedra, the bishop's chair. Bishop Kathryn was presented to the congregation as their new bishop, and the news was received with great joy.

All week, people who witnessed the ceremony have been posting photos of their new bishop on social media, announcing the good news that there is a new bishop, and they are glad. By now, the news of Bishop Kathryn's consecration has reached the ends of the world.

At his Ascension, Jesus tells the apostles that this is what they must do: be his witnesses “from here to the ends of the world,” telling the good news of his kingdom. These would have been astonishing words for those disciples, who hadn’t travelled more than 50 miles from their home. Now they were being asked to go to the ends of the world to share the good news about what they had seen with their own eyes.

They had seen his healing miracles. They had heard with their own ears his lessons taught and sermons preached. They had seen him die on the cross and experienced his presence following his resurrection. They had stories to tell! Of course, they had no idea in that moment where their travels would take them or what lay before them in their mission.

After Jesus’ Ascension, the disciples returned to the upper room to wait joyfully for the arrival of the Holy Spirit. You will see how, after Pentecost, they went from being fearful to bold, able to perform the same acts of healing as Jesus had done, drawing strength from the resurrected One, and being able to confront with composure and confidence the same authorities who had tortured and killed their teacher and friend.

But for this to happen, Jesus had to leave them. He had to return to the place from which he had come so that the Holy Spirit’s reach could go wherever it was needed.

The mission of the disciples is our mission today: to be Christ’s witnesses from our local contexts out to wherever we find ourselves in life — not to recruit followers of a religion, and not to enter into competition with other organized religious denominations, but to make disciples, people who espouse the same vision and attitudes of Jesus; people who love as Jesus loved by announcing the good news of the kingdom.

In one way, this kingdom is already here because of Jesus’ death and resurrection, but in many other ways it is yet to be realized here on earth as it is in heaven.

In the closing chapter of his book *Surprised by Hope*, Archbishop Wright describes our mission as taking place not in some imaginary realm, but in the real world of time, space, and matter. Because, he says, that is where real people live, where real communities happen, and where difficult decisions are taken. We must go to work in that space because the whole world belongs to God, and we must not rest if that space is spoiled or defaced — and not just on Sundays as we worship, but on every day of the week.

“One of the things I have enjoyed most about being a Bishop is watching ordinary Christians going straight from worshipping Jesus in church to making a radical difference in the material lives of people down the street by running playgroups for children of single working moms; by organizing credit unions to help people at the bottom of the ladder find their way to responsible solvency; by campaigning for better housing, against dangerous roads, for wise laws relating to alcohol, for decent library and sporting facilities, for a thousand other things in which God’s sovereign hand extends to hard, concrete reality. All this is not an extra to the mission and witness of the church, it is central.” — *Surprised by Hope*

This remains central to our mission as Jesus’ followers today: to be his eyes and ears and hands and heart in a world that is hurting and broken; a world that longs for a good word.

So...

What is God nudging you to do today to be his witness in the real world of time, matter, and space?

Every blessing of love today,

+Anne