

Today's First Reading (Acts 1:12-14) tells us that after the Ascension the apostles returned to Jerusalem and they stayed in the upper room where they prayed continuously together with Mary the mother of Jesus and several other persons.

The month of May is a month devoted to Our Lady and on this last weekend of May I want to reflect on her role as the 'Mother of the Church' not only being with the apostles in that novena of prayer between the Ascension and Pentecost but also continuing to exercise that maternal care over us now.

As well as praying together Mary and the apostles must also have talked and listened to one another during those days spent in the upper room. I am sure that they will have talked about Jesus and about their memories of the times they had spent with him. Maybe even it was a time when Mary recalled memories of Jesus' birth and early life and perhaps it was at this point that the apostles heard these for the first time. Maybe they recalled events they had experienced together such as the wedding at Cana. Maybe they remembered the words of Jesus that 'whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother' and realised that they were now a family joined not by biological bonds but by a shared faith in Jesus.

Soon after Pentecost the apostles travelled their separate ways to take the gospel 'to the ends of the earth'. The Bible tells us nothing further about Mary, but we know that on the cross Jesus had entrusted her to the care of his beloved disciple and that he had taken Mary to his home. I am sure that Mary extended her maternal concern and prayers not only to John but to all the apostles and their co-workers, and tradition suggests that they all gathered together once again as Mary's earthly life was drawing to its close.

As they went about their missionary activity the apostles appointed others as their successors, but Mary's role was a unique one. However Mary's maternal care for the Church founded by her divine Son did not end with her Assumption into heaven, but she continues to exercise it even now. That is why Mary has sometimes appeared and spoken to individuals through apparitions and dreams, sometimes with very personal messages and sometimes with messages addressed to the whole church or indeed the whole of humanity. However the first criteria for judging the authenticity of any such messages is that they do not add or take away from the Gospel but rather only remind people of what her Son has already told us.

If you are following the themes of the novena that I introduced on Friday then you will be on Day 3 and today's theme is 'the unity of the church'. In praying for Christian unity (we will do so in the bidding prayers) we are conscious that the devotion we as Catholics show to Mary can be an obstacle for some other Christians. Hence the importance of ensuring that our devotion to Our Lady is firmly based in the Scriptures remembering her words at the Annunciation, 'I am the handmaid of the Lord, let what you have said be done to me' as well as her words at Cana referring to Jesus, 'do whatever he tells you.'

We ask Mary's intercession for all our needs today, remembering especially all those directly affected by the coronavirus pandemic and all those working to keep us safe, and if you have not yet taken up the Rosary during this month of May then there is still one week ahead of us all in which to do so.