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## Reawakening Enthusiasm in the Baptized for the Gospel Mandate

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Even in contemporary writing, it is generally true that the beginning and the end of a piece are points of great prominence. An author starts or concludes with the ideas he or she wants above all to communicate and emphasize. By that norm then, one must understand that Matthew made much of the missionary mandate Jesus gave to his disciples just before his Ascension. Matthew reports this at the very end of the Gospel. In the command of Jesus, as found in Matthew, one notes a glide from past to present to future: “All authority has been given” (past), “go therefore” (present), “make disciples of all nations” (future). We are confronted here with no less than the foundation of the Church by the risen Jesus. This mission to all nations rescinds the circumscribed mission to Israel. Earlier Jesus had directed them, “Do not go into pagan territory or enter a Samaritan town” (Mt 10:5).

The disciples are to extend the teaching ministry of Jesus. This is a formidable task. That is why Jesus says by way of encouragement: “I am with you.” Jesus is Emmanuel (God with us)—a fact that is brought to our attention at the very beginning of this Gospel (Mt 1:23). The risen Christ is

present continually with his disciples as they undertake to carry out his command. The Gospel sounds the very same note at its conclusion: “I am with you always, until the end of the age” (Mt 28:20). This is a guarantee deeply needed by disciples who had so shamefully abandoned Jesus at the time of his Passion. The risen Christ is present continually with his disciples as they undertake to carry out his command.

It is interesting to note that this is the first time that Jesus sends forth his disciples to teach. Prior to this, Jesus stood out as the teacher. His disciples were the ones being taught. Up until this point, Jesus had shared with his disciples the power to heal, to drive out evil spirits, and to proclaim the Kingdom of God. Now after experiencing the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead, they are finally prepared to teach.

They are to go forth and teach people “to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt 28:20). The role of the disciple is above all to obey. The whole thrust of the disciple’s life is to carry out the will of the Master as thoroughly as possible. The disciple must “observe all” that Christ has

commanded. There cannot be any picking and choosing. The disciples must accept and preach the teaching of Christ as it is—undiluted, unrevised, and unabridged. In short, they must teach people “to observe all that I have commanded you.” The sincere disciple must obey everything whether he or she finds a particular tenet of faith gratifying or not. Jesus has disclosed the will of God. This is an astounding fact. It makes strong demands on us. The true disciple must be determined to carry out God’s will through thick and thin.

“And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.” This is one of the most encouraging assertions in all of Scripture. Jesus promises to be actively present within the Church. In this way he lives up to the prophecy made to Joseph at the beginning of the

Gospel (Mt 1:23): “‘They shall name him Emmanuel,’ which means ‘God is with us.’” As God does not abandon his Son, the Son assures his disciples that he will not abandon them. Sustained by the fortifying presence of the risen Christ and supported by his authority, the Church takes up and continues Christ’s mission: teaching people about God and their obligation to live by his truth.

The risen Christ has promised to stay with the Church forever to enable it to carry out its Christ-given mandate. Buoyed up by this divine presence, the Church cannot fail.

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