

Statement for Website
From Fr. Michael Basque

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When I was a boy, my family would visit Martyr's Shrine near Midland, Ontario almost every year. On each trip I would hear the story of how the Jesuit missionaries left their relatively comfortable life in France and travelled to Canada where life was uncomfortable, yet eventually made themselves comfortable. These men had to adapt to a new country and climate, learn a new language and eat different food. Why did they leave their comfort zone in such a radical way? I learned the answer to this question when I was part of a group of Brock University students who participated in a mission trip to Brazil in 2006. The area in which we worked had steep hills and tropical vegetation. The days were very hot and humid. The food was often unfamiliar. Most of the people spoke no English. However, these things didn't seem to matter much because we were making concrete improvements to the lives of extremely poor people. The work led us to become comfortable outside our comfort zone.

In today's Gospel, Jesus directs the Eleven to "make disciples of all nations". Besides his appearance to the women at the tomb, this is the only time when the risen Jesus met his disciples in Matthew's Gospel. Since Christ was about to ascend to his Father in heaven, it was important that the Eleven be commissioned to continue proclaiming the Gospel on earth. Earlier, Jesus had sent them out to preach the Kingdom of Heaven was near but only to the Jewish people. Now the mission would be extended to the entire world and involve baptizing and teaching everyone what Jesus had revealed. The Ascension signalled two crucial developments in the life of the Church: its head (Christ) would be glorified by his return to the Father which confirmed his divinity; and it would be required to enter a new stage of development. It would have to leave its comfortable past, where Jesus was physically present, and embrace an uncomfortable and often hostile future. However, by focusing on its mission of baptizing and teaching, and aware of Christ's continuing presence, the Church will become comfortable out of its comfort zone.

Catholics and other people of faith are called to be missionaries either through deliberate evangelizing efforts or the public practice of their beliefs. Given the often hostile attitude of our society towards religion, it is tempting for believers to live in a comfortable world where faith is separated from their public life. Missionary work is usually denounced as "imposing your faith" on other individuals. Religious freedom, which means that no one should be forced to believe in something against their will, is a fundamental right protected by the Constitution and upheld by the Church. However, in the Gospel Jesus still calls on his followers to proclaim the Gospel to all nations. This means they are called to leave the comfortable world of their private lives and go to the uncomfortable world of our secular society and become comfortable. But how?

Perhaps this Covid-19 pandemic might provide an answer to this question. Catholics and other people of faith should find their religious beliefs a source of strength and comfort in their every life. The crisis is certainly making a lot of people (including Catholics) uncomfortable. At this time our faith should make us different from those around us. We may feel fearful or anxious about recent events but our faith should temper those feelings with the reassurance we are not alone. Christ, as he reminds us in today's Gospel, remains with us until the end of time. This presence means we can face suffering (and yes even the possibility of death) without the same dread as those with no faith. Our confidence should enable us to provide an example to others; to

evangelize not just with words but actions. Over time we (and hopefully others) will become comfortable outside our comfort zone in the uncomfortable world of Covid-19.

Every time and place provides opportunities for missionaries. You don't have to travel across an ocean, get used to a new climate, learn a new language and eat different food to be a missionary. You just need to be able to become comfortable wherever you find yourself.