At times we can look at parts of the world and want to give up, thinking things won't or can't change, or people won't change.

But note in the first reading, the Apostles are told not to be standing about staring at the clouds; rather they are the witnesses of what Jesus has done, and will receive the power of the Holy Spirit and go throughout Judea and Samaria to the ends of the earth. They then get a reminder from two men in white garments, who tell them that Jesus will return. Until that time though, they are to get to work to evangelize and change the world.

At times we can be cynical as humans with all the world's problems. But Jesus challenges us to go and make a difference, because in this world, with work, hope can do so much to transform.

David Grillo Amodio, who lives in LA, was once a gang member. He fought for streets as he put it and anything you could think of as he says in his own words. He is now 55 years old. Last year he was the subject of a short film where he shared his story, but also one of hope.

In his addiction, in the neighborhood, he was once into selling, buying firearms, transporting drugs and illegal activities…a lifestyle that costs you your life or puts you or in prison for the rest of your life.

He grew up in a rough neighborhood and ran with a gang, he started a gang, and he felt he was accepted he loved the gang life.

One time, when he was all of 14, he went and grabbed a pistol not thinking about what he would do with it. He and other gang members walked up to a man, and he didn't want to give up a suitcase and told them "I'm not giving you guys anything", as he looked at them as kids, and an argument soon began and all of a sudden David just heard a pop. He looks back at that fateful moment, and says "It was a mess, we were kids, you know..so he wanted to take him to the hospital and we panicked, everyone left him for dead; but the police caught up with him and got him for murder in the first degree, possession of firearms and drugs and he was 14, sentenced as an adult.

In prison he accepted that he's a lifer and there is nothing else for him. For the gang world, he felt this was what he was made for; it was all he had, all he wanted.

Re-entry was never on his mind while being locked up. But eventually he was released. He came out with the mindset that "I've got to do what I've got to do to survive and keep pushing what I know best." He was into his gang, crime, caught up in everything. He wanted the good - a house, a wife, kids, a career - stuff he never had but did not know how to approach it and work on himself.

Having an abusive and alcoholic father who would get violent, he never really knew about love and mercy.

Then he met Fr. Greg.Boyle. He heard a lot of things about Fr. Greg and found out about his book "Tattoos on the Heart"; Fr. Greg founded "Homeboy Ministries" based out of Los Angeles.

As a young Jesuit, Father Boyle was placed at Dolores Mission, a little sister parish to a larger, wealthier one in East Los Angeles. He entered the Society of Jesus in 1972 and was ordained a Catholic priest in 1984. When

he arrived, Dolores Mission was primarily populated by refugees from El Salvador's civil war. Boyle Heights, the neighborhood he was in, was the epicenter of gang warfare, and much of his time was spent presiding over funerals. The deadly cycle of poverty was bearing out in his neighborhood, and the opportunity to break it was getting harder and harder to pull off — for no one wants to hire a felon. With no job prospects and a steady stream of death and incarceration, hope was in short supply. Father Boyle's neighbors who joined gangs believed their situation was inevitable. Life had one of two results: they would either be killed, or they would go to prison.

Surrounded by persistent hopelessness, Father Boyle figured out that the quickest way to disrupt this mindset was to employ the "homies" as they are called, giving them a job with a paycheck. He biked around East Los Angeles and made himself a nuisance in all the most dangerous places. He asked the people in these places to wash the windows of the church. He paid them out of pocket to build a garden. He invented tasks around the parish so that he could give his neighbors something, anything, to do in exchange for cash. He developed the mantra that's now part of the Homeboy uniform — "Nothing stops a bullet like a job."

The theology of Father Greg Boyle is amazingly simple: kinship. Identify the group that no one wants anything to do with, and go there. Stand there. Sit there. Wait there. Like Jesus going to the lepers and prostitutes, Father Boyle moved toward the group that everyone else in Los Angeles was running away from, locking up, and shutting out. He dignified gang members by forcing his presence within them.

He then started “Homeboy Ministries” which formally started in 1988 with 8 gangs at war with one another, and highest concentration of gang activity in LA. Before long he created a maintenance crew, a landscaping crew, all made up of members of the 8 warring gangs. Father Boyle has given people hope. People join gangs because they need community and an income, so he invites them into a community and offers them a job. Gang members kill one another out of a desire for self-preservation, so he makes a space where safety is ensured — and invites everyone. He has two New York Times bestsellers full of stories that prove this is possible.

And it’s not a pipe dream. In 1999, the Homeboy Bakery, Father Boyle’s first formal foray with former gang members into a business, burned down. They built it bigger. Now there are Homeboy eateries in Los Angeles City

Hall and a terminal of LAX. You can buy Homeboy chips and salsa at Kroger. There's a Homeboy catering service. They've had three decades of silkscreen and embroidery services. If an LA company need to recycle electronics? Homeboy's got a branch for that. If you work in solar, you can hire a Homeboy graduate with all the appropriate training. Each year, Homeboy Industries serves nearly 10,000 people in Los Angeles, offering a sanctuary of support and a pathway to a better life for formerly incarcerated and gang-involved individuals.

Homeboy boasts 13 social enterprises, each providing job training and purposeful work. The organization's holistic services include tattoo removal, legal aid, education, housing support, substance use disorder treatment, and mental health services. Fr. Boyle has also been around the world, going to Belfast, Northern Ireland to work with a partner program, and the "Global Homeboy Network" has 300 partners in the US and 50 abroad, which is built to support those coming out of prison to create social enterprises. Pamela Herrera, general manager of "Homegirl Cafe," (part Homegirl Ministries is a sister program he helped found that works with women) had been an addict since 12 years of age, called a "lost soul" by her grandpa, and lost a manger's job at McDonalds when it was rescinded

after her background check. Fr. Boyle met her and said “what can you do for me” and she aid “I want to change my life,” and he helped her to do that. Her grandfather she said died knowing she was no longer a lost soul but had found hope and was doing good again.

It gets at how he is like the person who throws the starfish back into the ocean washed on the shore, that the old man says to the little boy what difference does it make there are so many and the boy says it makes a difference for that one. That is Fr. Boyle. His work is primarily individual. He built relationships with the young men and women in his parish’s neighborhood because he saw their need and fixed it. As of today, 70% of the senior staff as his ministry came up through the program.

Fr. Greg was asked how do you keep yourself humble in light of praise; he said humiliation is his compass as the “homies” will needle him - “I don’t exist to rescue him, I’m here because I want to learn from him” as he put it about Grillo.

As for Grillo, he notes: “They believed in me and I believed in myself.” He got into scholarship program, college, wanted to become a drug and alcohol counselor and do something for someone else and not be selfish. He got to sponsor someone. Today feeding the homeless has inspired him to be a servant; it’s kept him grounded, valuable, humble and given him purpose. His goal is to start a non profit, contribute to re-writing the approach on addiction, continue to get his PhD, pay his bills, and live life making a difference. He says he’s “Too blessed to be stressed,” and happy, and he loves his life.

His story is one that is all about hope, and on this Ascension, it’s worth thinking about how we need that hope in our lives, both for ourselves, and to give it to one another.

Hope, however, is not just a vague trust in the future, but is a firm conviction that the Lord’s power and mercy will bring us to that future. It is a trust that no matter how arduous the journey, the Lord’s power is able to bring us to that heavenly inheritance. In the Letter to the Hebrews, it is precisely the fact that the Lord has entered into the heavenly sanctuary by his own sacrifice that gives us hope that we too can enter in. *Let us hold*

fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful (Hebrews 10:23). A similar sentiment is expressed by St Paul in his Letter to the Ephesians where he wants his readers to come to a fuller knowledge of Christ's power, a power which is 'far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come '(Ephesians, 3:21). Jesus has gone to heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father, like a general assuming command; the general would be on the high ground to direct the battlefield so they could see everything below them. Jesus is directing the work of the Church, and we are in battle every day with evil in the world, with temptations, with our struggles. As such Jesus is not gone, up there with the Father. Far from it - rather Jesus is in command of the Church and directing it's work. From this, He sends the Spirit to help us. When we are broken by sin, by life, Jesus is there to give us the Eucharist, the Spirit, His love and His mercy through the Church. We might not have the stories Fr. Boyle encounters daily, but we all have a story, including chapters we might not want to be there - but here is Jesus, always giving us hope and mercy, to free us from sin, to help us battle it, and to give us direction in life when we feel life is overwhelming, or that we may have let

others down or ourselves down, or that our goals are unattainable. God - like Fr. Boyle - sees to the heart and wants to give us a place in heaven.

But here's the thing: we have a job to do. This isn't heaven yet. We are members of that Church. The apostles are forever changed not just by the Ascension, but by all that God has shown them through the Christ. Now, having been changed, it is up to them to be Jesus 'witnesses. They go out and tell the world all that has happened, planting the seeds if you will that will eventually turn into a harvest of hope. So we have to ask ourselves how have we been challenged? We are Christ's witnesses when people see its effects in our lives. When we turn away from our old ways and continue the growth we had during Lent. When we move away from jealousy, pride, envy, lust and greed towards a life of virtue. When we challenge ourselves daily to love others as Christ has loved us. We must never forget that through our actions, we can do so much to teach others what it means to be a follower of Christ as people see Him through us, something I can say I've seen in so many people who have filled my life, and something I'm sure you can say as well.

Every day before us, we have an opportunity to be a person of hope in this world. To not just complain or think a person's future is written and write them off, but to see to the heart.

This weekend, we celebrated the ordination of 5 men to the priesthood in our archdiocese, among them Fr. Stephen Boatwright, whom many of you have known for years. When I think of him, "hope" is that first word that comes to mind in the sense that he lives out the words "thy Kingdom Come." He made a choice to go back to school for 2 years, because he discerned God had more work for him to do. He's lived his life as a loving husband and father, but also doing so much to help people, visiting people in hospitals and at home, doing that kind of one-on-one ministry Fr. Boyle does. When you speak to him it's very personal in that he treats you as Christ would treat you - he cares about the relationship and the person, and helps them in any way they can. Much like Fr. Greg Boyle, Fr. Steve doesn't stand about looking at the sky but every day gets to work helping people come to know who Jesus is.

If the apostles had stayed on the mountain looking at the sky, and taken the attitude of despair - the vice against hope - thinking Jesus has left, and

now we just have to wait to be with Him again, but there is nothing we can do, where would our Church be? God created you in His own image, and has a plan for you. And part of that plan is that you build up His body, which you do in ways you can't even imagine. Sometimes we don't see that plan and end up in bad places. But God believes in you, so listen to him. Think carefully about what God has called you to do, and when you get down, open your eyes to see your families, your friends, and your co-workers, and realize what good you have brought to them and never forget that every day, using the gifts of the Spirit that you have received, in you is the power to forever change this world for the better. So my fellow Christians, lets not be afraid to get to work.