

Ascension Sunday

An old man was on his death bed and wanted to be buried with his money. He called his priest, his doctor, and his lawyer to his bedside. "Here's \$30,000 cash to be held by each of you. I trust you to put this in my coffin when I die so I can take all my money with me."

At the funeral, each man put an envelope in the coffin. Riding away in a limousine, the priest suddenly broke into tears and confessed, "I only put \$20,000 into the envelope because I needed \$10,000 to repair the roof of the church."

"Well, since we're confiding in each other," said the doctor, "I only put \$10,000 in the envelope because we needed a new X-ray machine for the pediatric ward at the hospital which cost \$20,000."

The lawyer was aghast. "I'm ashamed of both of you," he exclaimed. "I want it known that when I put my envelope in that coffin, I enclosed a check for the full \$30,000."

Dear Friends,

Today we celebrate Ascension Sunday. Jesus ascended into heaven to be with God the Father, promised us the Holy Spirit, and asked us to engage ourselves by proclaiming his gospel on earth.

It is the perfect time to reflect deeper about Ascension in our practical life. We experience many painful goodbyes in life. There are so many times when someone we love has to go away, or we have to go away. There are many times when, for whatever reason, someone must move on, therefore irrevocably changing a relationship.

Parents, for example, experience this when their children grow up and leave home to start lives of their own. First, when a child leaves home to go to college, to get married, or to take a job elsewhere, we are often left with a restless heartache that leaves us feeling empty. But, after a while, especially when our child, in the full bloom of adulthood, comes back to visit us, our heartache can just as quickly disappear because our loved one, now no longer a child, can offer us a richer love and presence than he or she could when they were little. The pain of losing someone turns into the joy of finding something deeper in the one whom we thought we had lost.

When Jesus was preparing his disciples for his Ascension, he told them: "It is better for you that I go away! You won't understand this now. You will grieve and have heavy hearts, but, later, this will turn to joy, and you will understand why I have to do this because, unless I go away, I can't send you my Spirit." There is a deeper meaning and a purpose for the leaving.

There is an interplay between our presence and our absence. It is a great mystery. For certain times, we need to be present physically. At times it creates tensions, irritations, disappointments. Our absence opens up the world for our loved ones. It becomes routine in our relationship. But everyone keeps our spirit there.

Jesus promised the disciples to send the Holy Spirit upon them, to lead and guide them and commissioned them to proclaim the Gospel. The Ascension is about going away so that our loved ones can fully receive our spirit. It's about the mystery of saying goodbye, when goodbye isn't really goodbye at all, but only love's way of taking on a different modality.

A beautiful old story tells of how Jesus, after his Ascension into Heaven, was surrounded by the Holy Angels who began to inquire about his work on earth. Jesus told them about his birth, life, preaching, death, and Resurrection, and how he had accomplished the salvation of the world. The Archangel Gabriel asked, "Well, now that you are back in Heaven, who will continue your work on Earth?" Jesus said, "While I was on Earth, I gathered a group of people around me who believed in me and loved me. They will continue to spread the Gospel and carry on the work of the Church." Gabriel was perplexed. "You mean Peter, who denied you thrice and all the rest who ran away when you were crucified? You mean to tell us that you left them to carry on your work? And what will you do if this plan doesn't work? What's your Plan B?" Jesus said, "I have no other plan — it must work." — Truly, Jesus has no other plan than to depend on the efforts of his followers!