

Spring is a celebration of transitions. As the days of winter lengthen and warm, buds on tree branches grow larger, flower bulbs buried in the ground begin to send up tender shoots, until one spring day they burst forth in bloom. Spring is also a traditional time for human celebrations of transitions: graduations, weddings, and ordinations. This weekend's feast of Jesus' Ascension is also a transition celebration.

Transitions are times of joy and hope-filled expectation, but they also carry some little, or more, anxiety and sadness. Over the years I have witnessed parents on their children's graduation or wedding day whispering some last minute word of wisdom (often accompanied by the wiping away of a tear) to their child as she or he prepares to leave one stage of relationship with them and take their first step into a new state of life. And while graduates are filled with excitement that commencement day has finally arrived, there is also the dawning realization that after the commencement ceremony ends, relationships will change; some of their classmates with whom they may have shared thirteen, six, or four years of life together will never be seen again; with others time will alter their former relationships. For parents and teachers transition moments raise the question: Have we given those for whom we had care all that they need to meet the challenges of life that lie ahead of them? For the bride, groom, deacon or priest, or graduate the transition experience question is: Am I really ready to take this step?

This same dynamic, is present in the event of Jesus' Ascension. Jesus called and instructed his chosen apostles over a course of three years. In that time, by word and example, he shared with them all he had received from the Father. Now his work on earth was complete. Now his message and work would continue through the person of the Holy Spirit, the bond of unity and love between Jesus and his Father. For this to happen, the physical historical presence of Jesus needed to leave the world. Jesus, like parents or a teacher, would have to let go of the earthly relationship he had with the apostles for the sake of a new relationship in the Holy Spirit. In the Spirit he would dwell within them in an intimacy not possible if his physical presence were to remain.

But had he given them everything they needed? Were they ready for the mission? In the end, Jesus put his faith in both his Father and his apostles and is taken up into glory. Have we ever reflected on Jesus' Ascension as his act of faith in both his Father and us?!

Just as a bride and groom, a newly ordained deacon or priest, or a graduating student as they take their first tentative steps into the world on their own need to remember not only the lessons their parents, teachers or other mentors have taught them and carry their spirit within them, so the apostles world need to remember the lessons given them by Jesus and with a confidence born of faith carry within them the spirit of Jesus as they went into every corner of the world to spread his gospel and meet the challenges that would be theirs. We are here today because they chose to trust the word of Jesus and, in faith, stepped out in the Spirit. Now, it is our turn.

Perhaps this is best summed up by Father Ronald Rohlheiser who writes a weekly column in our archdiocesan newspaper *The Witness*. In a column titled "*The Mystery of Saying Goodbye*" Father Rohlheiser reflects: "As a parent you experience...your children grow up and move away. First there is the pain of letting them go, but eventually there is the joy of having those same children come back and stand before you in a new way, as adults now who can befriend you and be with you in a way that they couldn't as children. But this does not happen unless your children first go away. Good parents know that by hanging on too tightly, by not giving ...children the space within which to be absent, you not only stunt their growth, but you deprive yourselves of eventually having a wonderful adult come back to you with something deeper to give than the dependent love of a child."

Such was Jesus' love for his apostles. So, too, is his love and hope for us.