

“SAYING GOODBYE”

ASCENSION OF THE LORD

For May 27-28, 2017 – Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception

(based on Acts 1:1-11)

Deacon Frank Williams

Since last December, the Church has been on a journey.

A journey of the events surrounding Jesus Christ –
his birth, life, passion, death, and resurrection.

There are words in a hymn written by Colin Gibson:

*“He came singing love,
He lived singing love,
He died, singing love,
He arose in silence.
For the love to go on,
we must make it our song,
You and I will be the singers!”*

It was written about the Ascension.

What was promised was removed for a time,
so that it could be more fully given.

What a beautiful picture those words paint!

It speaks of what has happened
during this Easter season.

In the last few weeks we have walked
through the story of Jesus’ life,
passion, death and resurrection.

Now, with His Ascension into heaven,
so much more is promised –
but not yet fully given.

Like the Apostles,
you and I experience painful goodbyes in life.
There are times when someone we love has to go away,
or we have to go away.

There are times when,
someone has to move on
and change a relationship.
It’s always painful, sometimes so painful
that it leaves us feeling restless and empty,
as if all the joy has gone out of our lives.

But just as with the Apostles,
This “moving on” is not the end of the story.
After the restless, dark heartache
of a painful goodbye has worn off;
we experience just the opposite,
a deep joy in sensing our loved one’s presence,
yet now in a different way.

When Jesus was preparing his disciples
for his Ascension, he told them this:
“It is better for you that I go away!
You won’t understand this now.
You will grieve and have heavy hearts, but,
later, you will understand why I have to do this
because, unless I go away,
I can’t send you my spirit.”

Those are the unspoken words
that children say to their parents when they leave home
to begin lives on their own.

Those are the unspoken words
we say to our friends when we have to move on
from a single life to get married.

Those are the unspoken words
spouses sometimes say to each other
when they have to grow in ways that,
at the end of the day, will make their marriage stronger,
but which, on a given day, leave their partner with heartache.

Those are the unspoken words
we say to each other when we have to say a goodbye,
even if it’s just to go off to work for the day:
“It is better for you that I go away,
even if there is sorrow now!”

Absence is sometimes the only thing
that can purify presence. (*Repeat*)

When we are physically present,
there are always certain disappointments, flaws,
and faults in our character
that partially block complete love and approval.
That’s why we rarely appreciate our loved ones fully,
until they are taken away from us.

The mystery of saying goodbye
is really the mystery of the Ascension,
maybe the least understood mystery of our faith.

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 meaning
so that it can be present in a way that's deeper, and more intimate.
That truly is God's grace in action.

There is a prayer from an old prayer book
which illustrates the presence of God's grace in our lives.
It's a prayer which expresses our faith
in a loving and merciful God.

*Lord,
it is night.*

*The night is for stillness.
Let us be still in the presence of God.*

*It is night after a long day.
What has been done has been done;
what has not been done has not been done;
let it be.*

*The night is dark.
Let our fears of the darkness of the world
and of our own lives
rest in you.*

*The night is quiet.
Let the quietness of your peace enfold us,
all dear to us,
and all who have no peace.*

*The night heralds the dawn.
Let us look expectantly to a new day,
to new joys,
to new possibilities.*

Amen.

Thanks to Fr. Ron Rolheiser for his thoughts on saying goodbye in his homily entitled "The Mystery of Presence and Absence in Love" ©2011 – also to Steve Kelsey, who is a missionary of the Greater Hartford Regional Ministry in the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut for his inspiration in the hymn and prayer.