

Absence Makes Room for the 'Presence'

May 29, 2022

Gospel of Luke 24:46-53

Fr. John

We are all familiar with old saying: 'Absence makes the heart grow fonder'.

The Ascension names and highlights a paradox that lies deep at the centre of life, namely that we all reach a point where we can only give our presence more deeply by going away so that others can receive the full blessing of our spirits.

What does that mean?

When Jesus was preparing to leave this earth, he kept repeating the words: 'It is better for you that I go away! You will be sad now, but your sadness will turn to joy. If I don't go away you will be unable to receive my spirit. Don't cling to me. I must ascend'.

Any parent with grown children has heard something like that when the young people leave home to go to off to college or university or to begin life on their own. It's difficult to let go of the child you have nurtured since birth and to realize that they are no longer the little boy or girl any more. They need you to now give them the freedom in which they can grow as adults and return their love for you as adults. There of course is a certain pain in this kind of letting go, but to refuse to do that would be truncating and stifling life.

This is even more pronounced when we are dealing with the mystery of death. Losing a loved one brings on a sense of being orphaned, abandoned, of losing a vital life connection [one that, ironically, we had perhaps taken for granted until then].

But time is a great healer. And after a period of time has passed and we have come to accept their departure, there is a certain warmth that returns when we think of them and perhaps only now could they give us a blessing in a way that they never could when they were alive.

Their departure eventually created a deeper and purer presence.

The mystery of love and intimacy contains that paradox: To remain present to some one we love, we have to sometimes be absent in big ways and small.

This might even be particularly true in cases where our loved ones were rather difficult characters who struggled for peace or to bless anyone in this life. While they were still alive perhaps they had quirky habits that bugged us, or maybe they had particular views which we did not share. [I have listened to enough eulogies over the years when the speaker was honest enough to mention some of the negative qualities of the deceased - but doing so now in a loving and understanding manner.]

'It is better for you that I go away!' These are painful words most of the time, from a young child leaving her mother for a day to go to school, to a young man moving out of his family's house to begin life on his own; to a parent who has to leave his or her family for a week to go on a business trip, to a loved one who is saying goodbye in death.

Separation hurts, goodbyes bring painful tears and death of any kind wrenches the heart. But that is part of the mystery of love.

The feast of the Ascension of our Lord is a reminder that while God had given us Jesus, the human face of the invisible God, for a period of time and at a certain point in our history but His ultimate intent was that the risen Christ in his Holy Spirit could remain with us for **all time** and all ages. And in order to do that, we had to let go of one kind of presence in order to receive another.