

Reflection for Ascension Thursday A 2020

In lockdown, the last forty days may have seemed a long, long time and yet there is a sense that the Ascension has arrived all too quickly. We have only just become used to the risen Christ being present with us, and he is off again. This time for good!! At least it appears that way. We, unlike the apostles and the early followers of Jesus, know we have nine days – a novena – to prepare for the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It gives us time to reflect on all that Jesus had done, all that he had been through and, most of all, on what he had said. Unfortunately, he said many, many things and, in a time of loss like this, it is never easy to put them into perspective. The absence of a person truly loved and who truly loved us is overwhelming. Throughout this period of grief, there is a little part of us that knows that our loved one, just like Jesus, is in a better place - with the Father in heaven, and is experiencing a happiness, peace and joy that we know he (she) deserves. Another part of us, wishes that it did not have to be now. There is so much we wanted to ask and to say, so much deep love we wanted to share. And so much to thank them for but was never able to do so or were not sure how to do it. But amidst all this grief and pain, we begin to remember the good times and, yes, the great times we had together. Times that make us laugh and cry at the same time because of the sheer goodness and love that was present. People around us remind of the goodness and love of their lives. Despite the grief, sorrow and fear that the apostles and disciples of Jesus experienced, they would have talked long and often of their experiences and memories of Jesus over those nine days that followed the Ascension, and would have discovered new riches and new insights into Jesus. In that discovery, their wonder, love and understanding of Jesus would have gradually grown. Yes! There would have been regrets too. Regrets that need to be acknowledged but, then, gradually put to one side because of a growing feeling, may be only a spark at first, that you want to live your life so that your loved one will be proud of you. To live a life partly in thanksgiving for what you have received from them but also as an expression of your love for them. And, as this spark grows, you also realise that they have not completely gone but that their spirit is growing stronger within you. Their spirit then becomes an inspiration and motivation to live a life not only to thank them but to thank God for having given you the opportunity to have them as part of your life and for you to be a part of theirs. I believe that wines can be cellared for a number of years to help them mature. A time in which the wine develops its flavour and richness. Some wines should be drunk within 3 years but some can be stored for 25 years and even longer. With wine this process is called cellaring. With people it is called grieving. The apostles and disciples had very little time to bring out the full goodness of their relationship with Jesus but, unlike wine that eventually needs to be drunk within in certain time, the maturing process of the presence of Christ in our lives develops and matures ever more strongly as time passes. If we allow it, this is what happens with our loved ones who have died, for whom our love also grows stronger with time. The tears that still come to our eyes from time to time help to water this love with a water that helps it grow ever stronger. Jesus had to ascend to the Father or we would never have truly experienced how much he loved us and, of even greater importance, how much we truly love him!! The coming of the Spirit will bring us to the full realisation of this love which will burst forth from our lives just as it did for the apostles.

A man rushes his limp dog to the veterinarian. The doctor pronounces the dog dead. The agitated man demands a second opinion. The vet goes into the back room and comes out with a cat. The cat sniffs the body and meows. The vet says, "I'm sorry, but the cat believes that your dog is dead, too." The man is still unwilling to accept that his dog is dead. The vet brings in a black Labrador. The Labrador sniffs the body and barks. The vet says, "I'm sorry, but the Labrador thinks your dog is dead, too." The man finally accepts the diagnosis and asks how much he owes. The vet answers, £650. "**£650 to tell me my dog is dead?**" exclaims the man. "Well," the vet replies, "I would only have charged you £50 for my initial diagnosis. The additional £600 is for the **cat scan** and **lab tests**."