

The Ascension brings to us a new understanding to the disciples of how Jesus is present to us. When Jesus was lifted up beyond time and space, he moved from earth where his presence was a matter of fact – he had a physical body that all could see. He touched people, spoke to people and the like. But he could only be present to a specific number of people in a time and place.

After the Ascension, his presence with us becomes a matter of faith. But what this means is that millions upon millions of faithful see him through eyes of faith.

Jesus entry into heaven doesn't mean that he's gone away from us, but a new understanding of how he is present to us. The Ascension is not about Jesus being taken away from us, but Jesus being given to us for all times and for all places as a matter of faith. The bond is never broken.

+A Fr. Jack McArdle witnessed the following some years ago. A young man in his mid-twenties was being introduced to his biological mother for the first time. Both were quite nervous, but the meeting went well.

In this meeting, she told him that when she became pregnant as a young teenager, there was no way she would be allowed to keep the baby. She had to let him go for adoption.

However, she had a brown scapular of her own, which she took off, and placed it on the child. As she told him this story, he reached under his shirt and produced the scapular.

He had not known the story, but he had often wondered why his adopted mother always insisted on him wearing the scapular and taking good care of it. Every time it broke, she repaired it with great care.

Just as the scapular was some sort of bond, so it is with the promise of Jesus as he ascended to the Father. The Eucharist is our scapular.

At the Ascension, Jesus is both divine and human, which means the human body becomes for all eternity a part of who God is. We are now united to heaven through our humanity acting with his divinity. For just as he remained with us even after the Ascension, so we too are already in heaven with him.

Because “God is Love” every time we love we come into the presence of God. That is why we are encouraged to set our hearts on treasures that endure.

Every time we love, every time seek out the lonely, we unite ourselves in heaven to him. Every kind word, every forgiving embrace, every joyful laughter we experience, unites us. And by the same token, every time we find ourselves lonely, excluded, He experiences it, as we do on earth.

The Ascension shows us there is a common thread that runs through all of our lives it is the ending of something significant in order that we might begin a new adventure. Life is just that way. Shakespeare wrote: “All the world is a stage and we have our entrances and exits.”

Probably one of the hardest things a parent has to do is let go of their children. It begins in kindergarten when they have to drop them off away from home the first time. Then it is college and finally the day they move out of the house (for good!).

However, just because they are gone, doesn't mean you are no longer with them anymore than when Jesus ascended from letting go of his disciples.

Jesus says he is going away and simultaneously coming. His going away is not purely and simply a separation; it is in some sense a coming nearer.

Every day we casually meet and part with many people, and for the most part it doesn't churn up any deep feelings in us. But when we part with someone we love, that person somehow becomes spiritually all the more present. Their very absence makes them more present in our spirit.

It often happens that we appreciate someone only when they have gone away. When they were present every day, we hardly noticed them, or what we noticed were insignificant passing details. But when they have gone away, we see them whole. 'Not seeing' may be closer than seeing.

Love is not a slave to appearances; it does not cling to the thoughts and images by which we try to master one another. It sets the other free, and it can see the other in the invisible. That is why Jesus is more present, not less, in being ascended to the Father.

+Early in my priesthood, I made friends with a family who had just moved from Iowa to Williamsburg. They were only there for a few years and it was painful when they moved on, then on to another position in another state. I have lost count how many times they have moved since then.

However, they had moved many times prior to their move to Williamsburg. You can't exactly ask of the kids, "So where is your hometown?" However, one might ask, "Where is home for you?" It is where we are loved.

+As the author Robin Hobb put it, "Home is people. Not a place. If you go back there after the people are gone, then all you can see is what is not there anymore."

Hopefully, as we grow older in life, we begin to realize what is important and lasting, which is to love and to be loved and eventually find the beloved in another (You, as my parishioners are my beloved.)

Jesus had visited earth, spent time with us, but in the Ascension was his itch to return, home to the Father and the Holy Spirit. He had made his home in Mary and Joseph, but the fullness of home for Jesus is perfect love and that is our ultimate home – to be fully and completely loved.

For the past 12 years I have made my home at the Cathedral – not because of a building, however beautiful, but because of the love you have shown me. But we can't always stay on the mountaintop, can we? Some of you know this but others do not.

I have been asked by the bishop to take a new assignment starting July 1st at Our Lady of Nazareth in Roanoke VA. Now I have to go away, but I will always love my Cathedral – home for every parish – but for me, my heart will always be in Cathedral with all of you because of the love you have shown me.

Thank you for welcoming me into your home for the past 12 years. I Love you.