

# “SAYING GOODBYE”

## ASCENSION OF THE LORD

For June 5, 2011 – Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception

*“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!”*

That is the beginning of a song written by New Zealand composer Colin Gibson. What was promised is removed for a time, so it can be more fully given. What a beautiful picture of the Ascension those words are!

It explains what has happened during this Easter season. In the last few weeks we have walked through the story of Jesus’ life, 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 many painful goodbyes in life. There are so many times when someone we love has to go away, or we have to go away.

There are many times when, for whatever reason, someone has to move on and forever change a relationship. This is always painful, sometimes so painful that it leaves us feeling restless and empty, as if all the color, energy, and joy have gone out of our lives.

But just as with the Apostles, that is not the end of the story. Most of the time, after the restless, dark heartache of a painful goodbye has worn off; we experience the opposite, a deep joy in sensing our loved one’s presence 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, this will turn to joy and 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 certain circle of friendship 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 a heartache.

Those are the unspoken words we say to each other every time 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 tensions, irritations, disappointments, flaws in our bodies, and faults in our character that partially block full 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, the least understood mystery both inside and outside 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. This truly is God's grace in action.

There is a prayer from the New Zealand 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,  
new joys,  
new possibilities.*

*In your name we pray.  
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.*