

Reflection on the Ascension of the Lord

Letting go is a difficult part of life's journey and it applies to several different situations. When children begin to live a more independent life, when the people we work with and perhaps have mentored in some way move on to their own positions of responsibility, when illness and disability come close to home, finally when we or someone we love returns to heaven. These are natural events we all must face. It seems to me the disciples faced it twice with Jesus. The first time at his crucifixion and death and then, forty days later, when he ascended into heaven. Jesus spent time preparing the disciples for both events. A couple of examples can be mentioned here; the Last Supper discourse in the Gospel of John and the forty days of his appearances to them between the Resurrection and the Ascension. The celebration of the Ascension is different for us than it was for the disciples. We have not been accustomed to the visible presence of the Lord, but his presence through the gift of the Holy Spirit. But as we celebrate the Ascension of the Lord and Pentecost we know, that in some sense, we are letting go of Easter for this year. The lockdown Easter in which we have had to celebrate Easter in the best way we can, but also with our minds on avoiding the virus and dealing with its consequences. There have been public examples of sacrifice and resurrection as well as the ones we have known privately. Perhaps those involved have to let go of someone or something precious, but as Christians we know that as well as a letting go, there is a living on.

As we contemplate the Ascension of the Lord and 'let go' of the Easter season what are the expectations we hold in our hearts? For me it is summed up in the words of St. Teresa of Avila, the Spanish Carmelite mystic of the 16th Century. Her words are famous: *Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks with compassion on the world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.*" These words can lead our thoughts and prayers in several directions. In the CTS Daily Missal Pope emeritus Benedict XVI says: *"He, the Eternal Son, led our human existence into God's presence, taking with him flesh and blood in a transfigured form."* A cause of great joy, for where the head has gone the body hopes to follow. We speak of the Church as the Body of Christ, so we act together to show Jesus to the world and individually we live our daily witness. None of this is possible without the Holy Spirit whose animating presence amongst us we celebrate at the end of the month at Pentecost. Through the Ascension we see how intimate the closeness is between God and the world through Christ. This feast day's importance is seen in the way in which it reminds us how close God is to us and how we are charged with revealing that closeness to others. Jesus says: *Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.*

God bless you, Canon David