**Feast of the Ascension**  
Cycle C, 6.2.19  
**YOU WILL DO GREATER THINGS THAN THESE**

This time of the year is marked by graduations and commencement ceremonies for many families. Parents and grandparents share a bittersweet experience of bursting with pride over the growth and accomplishment of their children and grandchildren, excited for them as they begin another phase of their life’s journey; but also, some sadness and melancholy as their teenager moves from middle school to the bigger world of high school; or from high school probably away from home to enter college; or from a university degree to, hopefully, a job and an independent life as an adult.

At each of those stages parents are tempted to “hold on” to what was, even as they know they must let go and allow life to take its course. The poet and philosopher, Kahlil Gibran, wrote insightfully about this experience in his poem “On Children”:

*Your children are not your children.  
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.  
They come through you but not from you.  
And though they are with you  
they belong not to you.  
You may give them your love  
but not your thoughts.  
For they have their own thoughts.*

You may house their bodies but not their souls,  
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,  
Which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.  
You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.  
For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.  
You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.  
The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite.  
And He bends you with His might that His arrows may go swift and far.  
Let your bending in the archer's hands be for happiness;  
For even as He loves the arrow that flies,  
So He loves the bow that is stable.

I wonder if some of this sentiment of both joy and melancholy was present in Jesus’ heart at the end of his earthly ministry – this feast of the Ascension we celebrate today. He, like parents, had to let go. He had to trust God enough to believe that his work would continue and his mission would go on. He had done all he could to form and shape his followers in the ways of God’s Kingdom. Now he had to trust and believe that the Holy Spirit, whom God the Father would send to the disciples, would empower them to carry on – to be Christ’s presence on earth. He had to trust God and trust his disciples.
There are people we entrust with our lives - or a big part of our lives, anyway. We entrust the education and care of our children to teachers and coaches. We entrust our retirement savings and college funds to financial managers. We entrust the structural security and efficient operation of our homes to contractors, electricians and plumbers. Firefighters, police, doctors and nurses – all professionals we entrust with our health and safety. We trust these folks because they have demonstrated a sense of responsibility and competence in their fields and have proven that they will act in our interests.

And there are many people who have entrusted some part of their lives to us: your employers, your clients, our friends – and, most important of all, your families and children. It’s no small thing to be entrusted as such. It means putting aside our own interests to seek what is best for those who have placed their confidence in us. It begins by understanding and appreciating what they want to make of their lives and their expectations for the future. To entrust some part of our lives to another requires letting go, respecting their expertise and competence, accepting the reality that some things will go wrong or fail, that nothing is forever. And to accept the responsibility of taking on what someone entrusts to us requires patience, understanding – and being ready and willing to say what they may not want to hear, but have to. Such trust, such commitment, is sacred.

In the parting words of Jesus from John’s gospel, we hear Jesus’ confidence: *I tell you for certain that if you have faith in me, you will do the same things I am doing. You will do even greater things, now that I am going back to the Father.*

Today, on the mount of the Ascension, Jesus entrusts to us his life, his Gospel of healing, compassion, reconciliation and hope. Having given his life to reveal the love of God for all of us, he entrusts that work to you and me. He commissions us to be his "witnesses" and to continue his work – with all its risks and despite all our doubts. The work of building his church of reconciliation and love requires of us humility, respect, patience; it asks us to let go of our own interests and wants to open our hearts to change and a willingness to cope with that change. In baptism, every Christian of every time and place takes on the role of witness to all that Jesus did and taught. We are witnesses not only in our speaking the powerful words of the Gospel but in the quiet, simple, but no less powerful expressions of compassion and love that echo the same compassion and love of God – God who is Father and Mother to us all.

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