



Thoughts on the Journey...

Suanne Gettings—Pastoral Associate - May 24, 2020

A couple of years after my father died, my younger sister and I were having a conversation on the phone. At the time, she was in New Jersey and I was in Ohio. Phone calls with Joni are always fun because we laugh and cackle about everything. As the hilarity quieted down in decrescendo style, she slipped in words that we all felt since my father's death, "You know Susie, I really miss Dad." Her words were comforting in the sense that her saying it aloud pierced the bubble of what I was feeling, releasing the tension of my own grief. She then shared with me an experience she had at the time.

It was a Sunday morning and she was at Mass at her parish. Her eyes were drawn to a man several pews to her left. His stature was like my father's and she thought of my Dad immediately. Joni could not take her eyes off of him. The stranger's hairline, his face, the dark blue sports jacket, the way he held his head, his hands, all these similarities to my father, emotionally pulled her toward him. My sister goes to the same church, at the same time, and sits in the same pew each week but had never seen this man before that day. As hard as she tried, she could not focus on the Mass, but instead found herself in a kind of gravitational pull toward this gentleman. After Communion, she lifted her thoughts to God, thanking him for the gift Dad was to her throughout her life.

After Mass, she was walking to her car to return home, and a man called out to her, "Excuse me miss." Joni turned to see that the man who was calling her was the man she was fixated on during Mass and her face wore the surprise of his approach. He said, "I'm sorry dear, I didn't mean to startle you. I just wanted to tell you how pretty you look today." Joni shared with me that in that instant, she was sure that was Dad. It filled her with so much joy and awe that all she could say was "thank you". She sat in her car for some time afterward savoring the gift of that encounter and felt a peace come over her as she thought about the wonder of God's love and the many ways he reveals himself to us.

This weekend, we celebrate the Feast of the Ascension when the resurrected Christ, after spending time instructing his apostles, ascends to heaven. What a glorious experience it must have been for Jesus' disciples to go from the grief and sorrow of their friend's crucifixion and death, the fear that followed, the confusion of not understanding what it all meant in relation to their Messiah (their loved one), to then having Christ come to them after he had risen. He came to

bring them the assurance of his continued love and his promise of life after death.

Jesus' ascension into heaven was a crucial part of the salvation plan. Jesus needed to return to his Father. But, make no mistake about it, he never abandoned the apostles! Quite the contrary! He gave the apostles *himself* in a new way. Rather than Jesus walking beside them on earth in the flesh, Jesus was now dwelling within each one of them, along with the saving power of the Holy Spirit! Jesus was no longer limited by time, or space, or matter. He would reside within each of them individually in an intimate way, never forsaking them – bonded to them heart and soul. It changed everything! These men, once huddled in fear, now entered Jerusalem with great joy!

Today we celebrate this feast of profound meaning and the promise of WHO WE ARE EMPOWERED TO BECOME IN HIM. The same legacy Jesus left his apostles is the same legacy that Jesus left for us, too, along with two thousand plus years of saints and ordinary every day people who prioritize their lives to being about the Father's business. The Feast of the Ascension we celebrate, reveals the inner meaning of the ongoing mission of the Church and our call to actively participate in building the kingdom of God, to live our lives in a way that brings others to the Father.

At one time or another, we will all experience the sting of death, the profound emptiness that comes from the loss of someone we love, someone who has given great meaning to our own lives. We are no different than the disciples. We all long to have just one more touch, one more moment to glance into their eyes, just one more opportunity to whisper to our loved one something we didn't before they left this earth. More often than not, we are given the gift of that opportunity in dreams, in intuitive moments, in memory, in actual brushes with those who have gone before us like that experienced by my sister.

Jesus' life on earth was temporary, just as our life on earth is temporary. On this feast of great joy and hope, let us re-commit to being authentic witnesses bringing the light of Christ to a darkened world. Our life in Christ begins with having a relationship with Jesus that grows through prayer, service, scripture, and the sacraments.