

The Easter season lasts for just over 7 weeks. On the 50th day we celebrate Pentecost with the coming of the Holy Spirit. When the Church is born, the Apostles take to heart their new mission to spread the Good News to the ends of the earth and they do a wonderful job of calling upon Jesus to help them build the church with thousands being baptized at a time.

At the beginning of the Easter season, we spent the first 8 days focusing on the unbelievable but true fact that Jesus rose from the dead. Saint Paul summarizes this in the Acts of the Apostles. Jesus appeared to Peter, then to the Twelve. This makes sense as Peter is the rock that Jesus is using to build the church. Peter must be fortified to shepherd the church. “After that, he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at once” (15:6).

As we approach the end of the Easter Season in under two weeks, there is a noticeable shift as Jesus is preparing to leave for good and to send the Holy Spirit in his place. Jesus will return to the Father, but he will not leave us empty handed. “The glorified Jesus will send the Holy Spirit to dwell in his disciples and draw them into spiritual union with himself. Then the properly divine works of God, performed in Jesus’ humanity, will be performed by the disciples in communion with the risen Jesus.”ⁱ

If we were to put ourselves in the place of those first Christians who encountered the risen Christ, we would want to hold onto Jesus for dear life and not let him go. But this would be counter to the Divine Plan that has Jesus reunited with the Father in heaven where he can intercede for us. “Jesus will be in the position to hear and answer prayers.”ⁱⁱ

It is hard to let go. I know that when my father passed, I mourned and grieved and didn’t want to let go. Looking back, I can see a bit of selfishness on my part in wanting to hold on. Over time, I have come to realize, that God who had a vocation for my father during his earthly life, also has one for him in the Kingdom of Heaven. My father did not stop caring about his loved ones with death. During his earthly life he reached out to many a stranger and offered a visible helping hand. The spirit of love is still alive, although the works are perhaps more hidden and less visible.

Saint Therese of Lisieux understood this well. She wanted to be a missionary although she lived in a convent and was devoted to a life of prayer. She wanted to be a martyr. She ended up dying of tuberculosis and united her suffering to the suffering of the legions who died of that painful disease before medical science could be brought to bear to alleviate its effects. She wanted to be an apostle and preach the good news. In the end, she realized this earthly life is too short to accomplish all the good that she possibly could. With God’s grace, she decided to continue her vocation to make God loved by showering the earth with roses, with miracles from heaven.

It is hard to say goodbye, and there is a part of us that wants to hold onto our loved ones when they pass. But as with the disciples of Jesus, this can go counter to the Divine Plan. Let us rejoice at each life that dies and rises to new life in Christ. Let us recognize that after any necessary healing and strengthening that takes place in purgatory, another saint in heaven is ready to intercede for us.

ⁱ Martin, Francis; Wright, William M. IV. The Gospel of John. Pgs. 246-247.

ⁱⁱ Ibid, 247.