Our CTK pastor, Fr. Paulson Mundanmani reflects on the many faces of Transitions at this time of Jesus’ Ascension

When I was a young seminarian, attending High School Junior and senior years, I was sent to the North eastern part of India to place named Shillong.

After completing my college, and an additional degree in Philosophy (western and Indian), I was sent to a technical school with boarding that housed 200 school boys where I taught Mathematics and workshop calculation, and electricity.

It was a time of transition for the mission field. The Holy See entrusted the Northeastern region of India to the Salesian from 1906 that brought in priests and brothers from Europe- Italians, Irish, Spaniards, English to mention the dominant groups.

75 years later, our foreign missionaries were handing over the mission to Indian priests and brothers, who were mostly from southern India.

It was a difficult transition for many reasons. The transition of leadership in a church is the most crucial time in the life of the congregation. And it’s also historically the least shepherded by anyone.

The foreign missionaries brought in a lot of resources including money while the Indians did not have access to much of that. There was lack of trust between the groups.

Our foreign missionaries were apprehensive of Indians taking over, feeling that they were not up to the task. Indians were suspicious of the remnant group that continue to minister. There was so much pain, and distrust in the initial stages.

When I was ordained a priest on January 1, 1991 there was another difficult transition taking place-transitioning to the local vocations.

We really did not like each other. There was resentment, pain and things were again difficult.

Today, we celebrate the feast of Ascension, the first important transition that took place in the Church. You see God sent his only Son in to the world.

At age 30, he made his public debut, bringing together a team of men, that he personally hand-picked and trained. And then, at 33, his life comes to an abrupt end, the crucifixion followed by resurrection.

And then, after 40 days he ascended into heaven. 40 days- I want you remember that number.

So what is ascension?
It was a well-orchestrated transition- Jesus took the disciples to a hill, blessed them, and gave the mandate to go into the whole world and spread the good news.

And then, then he was lifted up from their sight.

This is what is the final celebration of the transition- Jesus’ empowerment of his disciples and final departure from their midst.

Transitions take much more than a ceremony. That is why 40 days are important.

We go through transitions all the time… Transition means change—it signifies that there is something to leave behind and something to look forward to.

Ascension means 40 Days of transition.

Are you going through a transition at this time? Our students are transitioning from the comfort and safety of an elementary school to the thrill of High school and changes of adolescence.

Some of us in our 60s and 70s will probably face what we have dreaded all along – “Old Age,” when we will have to leave our car keys behind, trust others to take care of our assets and much more.

Terminal illness like cancer or surgery that changes ones lifestyle can be difficult transitions. We transition jobs, or move from one area to another.

Did you know that over 260 families have newly joined and registered at our parish in the last two years?

Have you met them? No? Well, that is a topic for conversation next week.

The Ascension reminds us that it took 40 days for Jesus after his resurrection to prepare them for his own departure from this world.

1. God gives us the Time (40 days) we Need to Adjust and Release the Past.
When Jesus told His disciples that He would be leaving them, their hearts were troubled. After the emotional lows and highs of Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection, He gave His followers 40 more days of personal fellowship with Him.

This time enabled them to adjust—to release their expectations of the past and to embrace God’s agenda.

2. Transition is an Invitation to Intimacy with God. Jesus continued to encounter his disciples in so many ways. Remember the two disciples who took transition wrongly, and decided to quit all together to Emmaus. Jesus took time to join them on their journey for the whole day, listening to them, answering their questions. Well at the end of the day, as they sat for dinner, He opened their eyes and they recognized him. They said, yes, we got it. and they went right back to Jerusalem.

Jesus would join the disciples on their fishing expeditions and even work miracles. Remember, how the disciples spent the whole night fishing and caught nothing, and how the Risen Lord came to them and asked them to cast the net into the water.

The large haul of fish!

Jesus would enter into the upper room where they were behind closed doors for fear, anxiety.

He would breathe his spirit upon them. On one occasion, he would call Thomas to the fore and ask him to touch his wounds.

Thomas would respond, “My Lord and my God. “

In many ways, through many encounters, Jesus would open the eyes and hearts of his disciples to understand and believe.

Yes, transition offers us an invitation to intimacy with God.

In your own transitions, it is important to take time to pray and commune with God – to speak to him about your pains, fears and anxieties.

3. Transition is Preparation for the New Thing God is Doing

‘When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.’

Prior to Jesus’ crucifixion, His followers were unable to comprehend the Father’s purpose for Jesus’ death and resurrection.

During these 40 days, they now had a post-resurrection perspective.

Jesus took time with them to explain the Father’s plans for the expansion of His Kingdom. The outcome of this period was that this small group of believers and Apostles were positioned for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

They were prepared for the birth of the Church and the mission ahead of them.

Transition is not a place to get stuck—it heralds the fact that the ‘new’ thing God is doing is on its way. It is time to get God’s perspective on what you are going through.

Jesus wants to prepare you for what Father has ahead and what He will do in His Kingdom through you. Be assured that God is in control of the times and seasons in your life and in His Kingdom.

I would like to end with a thought from the Gospel of today. He told his disciples, “Stay in the city until you are clothed with the power of the Most High.”

When you are in transition, don’t rush.

Stay put, pray, commune and wait until you feel the power of the Most High before you move forward.