

“Letting Go” - Ascension 2011

At the university, ascensions are happening every day; students are finishing their exams and leaving, some of them for good. They are disappearing from each other's sight and even if they may see each other again, it will never be the same. The Essex University they knew leaves with them and in October a new one will be born. So there is a tinge of sadness in the air; young women and men party and mourn.

It must have been the same for the Apostles. They had had a university degree length of time with Jesus - three years - and then He left them and they stared into the sky, holding onto his presence as long as they could. All of them must have wished that Jesus could stay with them and that things could remain the same. But earlier the risen Jesus had said to Mary Magdalene when He appeared to her and she tried to hold onto him: 'Do not cling to me.' It seems cruel but she had to let him go.

We all must let go of the past. It does none of us good to hold onto it. I can remember as a boy, one summer holiday, being taken to Pollock's Toy Museum, near Goodge St in London. Its glass cases were filled with dolls and teddies and though only eight or nine years old, I felt inexpressively sad. Toys are to be played with, outgrown, and then left behind. But in this museum, someone had tried to freeze childhood and it was chilling. Childhood is wonderful but only as a passing stage to adulthood.

We were made for change. As Bl. John Henry Newman wrote, 'to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.' On this Ascension Day, Jesus goes to his Father in Heaven not to leave us behind but to change things; to prepare us for adulthood. So far, like a parent, he had held onto our hand and we had never gone far from His sight but now it was time for us to go out into the big world: 'Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations.'

Yet at the same time he promised: 'And know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.' He goes but His Spirit will come. Change is not easy; we are all conservatives with a small 'C.' So Jesus sent His love to reassure us and His catalyst for change - the Holy Spirit. We who are baptized and confirmed have been initiated into the adulthood of faith but we often have something of the child about us: fear, stubbornness, pride. Today, as Jesus ascends we should consciously try our best, with the Holy Spirit's help, to leave childhood behind and walk forward with hope, openness and peace into our future. Christ reigns in Heaven and through us He wants to reign on Earth.