

Now What?

I can recall very clearly my first day of school when my mother and father took me to school and left me there. I watched them as they walked back to their car. I remember crying great tears of sadness.

It happened again when my parents drove me to college and left me there...I recall watching them drive away...as I carried my luggage to my dorm room. There were both tears of joy and sorrow.

Or what about those of us here who have lost loved ones and when we are at the cemetery and they lower the casket into the ground and after the final prayers the funeral directors announce that "this concludes our service.... you may return to your cars." Those tears may stream for days or years.

In these situations of transition, moving from one phase of our lives to another, we feel all alone and vulnerable, and ask: "Now what?"

I believe that may indeed have been what the disciples experienced on the day of the Lord's Ascension into Heaven.

The crucifixion didn't make sense to the disciples. The resurrection was unbelievable as well when they first heard the news, and were doubly astounded when they witnessed him alive again! And just as they were getting used to him being with them, he informs them that he must ascend to the Father.

The disciples lament: "We were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel." And the disciples asked, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" The disciples were a lot like us: thick headed. Can you imagine it...the disciples are worried about whether Jesus is going to restore the kingdom of Israel to its former glory!

They were still stuck in the old mindset that religion is about power and that the Kingdom is about material wealth or fame.

"Oh, how foolish you are," Jesus says in Luke's account. The disciples we're hoping that he would restore the good ol' days. Yet is that really what Christ came to do? And can we ever truly recover the good ol' days? And what are the good ol' days? And were the good ol' days all that good?

So on the day of his Ascension, Jesus gathered his scattered flock together and led them out as far as Bethany where Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived – perhaps he wanted to bid his dear friends farewell, along with the rest of the Apostles and disciples. I imagine His mother was there as well.

And as He Ascends into Heaven the disciples are still a bit clueless because they are staring at the sky until two angels inform them that they ought to move along. They might as well have said to them: "this concludes our service.... you may return to your cars."

Now what?

In one respect we cannot remain fixated on the clouds above and ignore the plight of our fellow human beings! On the other hand, we cannot allow our entire focus to be here below. We must seek that fine balance of being centered in Christ, with the eyes of our hearts fixed on the things of heaven, yet also our eyes seeking Christ in our neighbor and our ears being open to the cry of the poor and our hands outstretched to all those in need!

The early church community could not remain hidden away living a private religion in the upper room. They could not live in the past, but had to move forward into the future! We have to recognize now more than ever the urgency of the gospel message and that it must be proclaimed!

So the Ascension was a new beginning. The disciples were no longer downhearted but rather full of joy, assured that Christ could no longer be separated from them. As I attended the college graduation ceremony for my sister-in-law, I was once again reminded of those first days when I was left alone on the campus of college as well as the day of graduation.

I spoke with my sister-in-law, and other graduates about their experience of their first days of college and their graduation. We found that both events brought joy mixed with uncertainty.

In a way we had all been at similar crossroads as were the first disciples and asked: "Now what? "

The graduates have walked across the stage, received their diploma and heard those glorious words: "Graduates: By virtue of the authority and power granted to me, I now confer on you all the "rights, privileges, and responsibilities to which you are entitled."

So "Now what? A graduate can't let those word go to his head. These "rights, privileges, and responsibilities" are words of great consequence. In the words of Spiderman: "With great power comes great responsibility!

And just as graduates receive their degrees, all of us as disciples will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit in order to fulfill our mission as Church!

But let's face it, coming down the mountain after experiencing Christ's Ascension is hard, and living the faith, day in, day out, is going to be hard.

It's tough for children as they adapt to new surroundings in a new school. It's difficult for college graduates to adapt to a new way of life in the working world. And for us too, it is a great challenge to constantly adapt to the changing circumstances that call us to embrace our faith anew. But this is what we are called to on this feast of the Ascension.

Just as the disciples realize that they could not dwell on the past, we too must work to bring about the kingdom now!

The urgent call to repentance must echo through our world. Forgiveness must be extended to all! And tidings of great joy have to be spread far and wide!

We are assured that Christ is seated at the right Hand of the Glory of God. We have a heavenly intercessor in Heaven who hears our prayer as we head back to school or work or home each day.

Now What? When we walk out of here, will be dumbly looking to the sky, - or will we get on with the job of spreading the word?

We cannot live in the past, but must move forward into the future, by being clothed from the power from on high, the Holy Spirit!

And on the Last Day we too will ascend to Heaven and hear the Words of Christ: "By virtue of the authority and power granted to me, I now confer on you all the "rights, privileges, and responsibilities to which you are entitled as my disciples. Come into the presence of my Father where there will be great joy, where every tear will be wiped away."