

May 20, 2012
Feast of the Ascension

Men of Galilee, why do you gaze in wonder at the heavens? This Jesus who you saw ascending into heaven will return as you saw him go. Alleluia!

- Acts 1:11

Departures are often bittersweet. When the first child leaves the door for kindergarten, or later with bag in hand, they wave goodbye on the way to college.

How many sweethearts have watched with tears in their eyes as their beloved go off to war; some will return. Some they will never see again. And at that moment, they do not know if it is the last "goodbye".

Last summer, I hugged Dr. Bill Heusel and his good wife Mona "Goodbye!" and this month Mona lost her life in a sudden traffic accident. Goodbye was fully goodbye. In our life journeys we should bring special blessings to both greetings and to all our goodbyes.

So how did we ever come to say "goodbye"? And what is it supposed to mean. We know that Shakespeare used it in the 16th century when it was "God be with thee". As we humans tend to do, we shortened it to "goodbye." However, it is still a blest word.

So at the mount of the Ascension, how did Jesus offer his goodbye? He made it clear that God would be with the apostles and with us. He would not leave us orphans. He would send the Holy Spirit, the Consoler. And he also assured them and us that he would "come again".

So the "goodbye" of Jesus was not bittersweet like so many of our goodbyes. It was not bitter. It was sweet.

When he said his goodbye it was evident that his apostles still had a lot of work to do. Right up to the last moment they mistakenly were asking was he NOW going to restore the Kingdom to Israel!

They were slow learners, as are we.

Some of our bishops seem to be launching an inquiry into the Girl Scouts now!
Should we be surprised? After all, the apostles were often dolts and especially so at the Ascension!

Their future learning would not be just in their minds, but also in their hearts, and so should ours. It is one thing to memorize the catechism and have a lot of dogmas in our brain, although few of us do. The Creed is usually quite adequate.

But it is another thing altogether to educate and form our hearts. One of the more beautiful and insightful passages in scripture occurs in today's second reading:

*Brothers and sisters,
May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ,
The Father of glory
Give you a spirit of wisdom,
And revelation resulting in knowledge of him.
May the eyes of your hearts be enlightened?
That you may know the hope that belongs to his call,
What are the riches of glory in his inheritance among?
The holy ones and what is the surpassing
Greatness of his power for us who believe.*

The eyes of our hearts...!

In *The Little Prince*, St. Exupery gives us a similar memorable phrase:

“It is only with the heart that one sees rightly.”

Breakfast Question: What do you think about St. Exupery’s quote?

Personal Reflection: Am I warm and attentive enough both in my greetings and in my goodbyes?