

Ascension A June 5, 2011 – Fr. Gerald Haemmerle

On Friday afternoon St. Charles Borromeo Grade School had their annual bridging ceremony. It is sort of a farewell to the eighth graders, who all bring up something symbolic of their years here. It is a handing over of the leadership of the school to the seventh graders as each eighth grader accompanies a seventh grader as they walk across a symbolic bridge. But the most touching part of the service is when the first graders, who have had an eighth grade big brother or sister for the whole year, present to that big brother or sister a farewell card. A few hugs are exchanged. When the eighth graders march out of church, they are jubilant and excited about moving on, even if it is only across the parking lot to a bigger school. But the first graders were all coming out of church with tears running down their cheeks. I tried to comfort them, I said that I was not leaving them, I would be back next year, they looked at me, and continued to cry.

In life there are many goodbyes, many farewells and moving on. It is always painful when we move on or when a loved one moves on. We are often left with the pain of an empty heart. But that is not the end of the story. The pain of the empty heart lessens with time, and eventually we experience the joy of our loved one's presence in a new and different way.

Let me give an obvious example. When a child leaves home for college, to get married, to take a job elsewhere, the parents feel great sadness, an empty heart. But when the child returns home, no longer a child but an adult, that heartache can turn into great joy, their relationship is now between two adults, it is a deeper and more mature relationship.

I believe this is true when we are talking about the ultimate departure on earth, death itself. When we lose a loved one, we feel great sadness and emptiness. That gradually lessens. For people of faith, we do begin to experience more fully their presence in our lives, we believe that they live on with God, that we will be reunited with them when we die, and that in many ways they are still with us.

Today we celebrate the feast of the Ascension. While Jesus was on earth he tried to prepare the disciples for his passion and death, but when it happened they were crushed and confused. That turned to joy when he rose from the dead. But then he immediately began to talk about his leaving them again, and that it would be better for them, for then he could send them the Holy Spirit, his spirit. And in that spirit he would always be with them. Next Sunday we celebrate the feast of the coming of that Holy Spirit. That spirit is still with us today, and we rejoice in that.

In our first reading, as Jesus ascended, the disciples were looking up at the sky, and the two angels asked them, "Why are you looking at the sky. Get busy doing my work." And In the gospel Jesus said, " I will be with you always."

We are acknowledging another departure today. As you know, Mrs. Fran Moore, Miss Judy Ellebrock, and Mrs. Mary Borrows are leaving the school, they are retiring at the end of this school year. Mrs. Moore has been involved in Catholic Schools for 44 years, and has been the principal at St. Charles for the past 6 years, and has done an exceptional job. Miss Ellerbrock has also been involved in Catholic schools her entire career, has always done a wonderful job, and the amazing thing is that she has spent the past 42 years at St. Charles as a teacher, a principal for 9 years, and most recently as the assistant principal. St. Charles has had four pastors in its entire history, and she has outlasted three of them. And Mrs. Borrows has been a teacher for 38 years, but the past 22 years she has taught at St. Charles. Ask any of her former students and they will tell you how great a teacher she was.

All three are departing from our school, but in so many ways their presence will always be in that school because of the wonderful work they have done and the legacy that they leave. We are blessed with the fact that all three of them are parishioners, and we will be seeing them at church and in the parish for years to come.

Thank you all for a job well done.