

Keith Kingsley

I want to share a few insights about Ascension that I've gained from a valued spiritual teacher, Ronald Rolheiser.

He has helped me perceive a significance of this event that focuses neither on the hard-to-imagine Jesus floating off into the clouds, nor on the image of Jesus sitting on a celestial throne in heaven. These are not bad or wrong images, but they don't quite capture another meaning that touches me more immediately.

The ascension is part of a process of transformation in which we are invited to let go of our precious attachments in order to receive a new life and spirit.

Rolheiser illustrates this with the story of Mary Magdala encountering the resurrected Jesus near the tomb, thinking him to be the gardener. When she recognizes him she wants to embrace him.

But Jesus cautions, "Don't cling to me, Mary!"

The Jesus that Mary wants now to touch and clutch is not the same Jesus Mary once knew: True, he bears the wounds and scars that killed him but he has been resurrected as Lord in a new form whom she cannot "hold" as before.

Then for forty days, Mary and the other disciples have snatches of contact with this new Jesus, who encounters them with both grace and mystery, with gentle chiding, teaching and forgiveness....until one day he departs from their presence.

He ascends. And he's gone.

Ten days later, the Holy Spirit falls upon these folks and they begin to recognize the presence of Jesus among them—again—as he had promised, even before his death.

We must imagine that the 40 days of Jesus' resurrected presence with Mary and the other disciples was a time of radical adjustment—both elation because of his presence and also puzzlement by his elusiveness, as well as grief around the losses of the past when he had been so available to them.

Rolheiser calls this the Paschal Mystery:

--Good Friday...the shock of real death

--Easter Sunday...the wonder of new life

--Forty days....readjustment to the new and grieving for the old

--Ascension....letting go of the old, refusing to cling

--Pentecost....receiving a new spirit for the new life that has already begun.

So the Ascension was the moment of decisive letting go of all the attachments to a reality that had deeply touched these men and women, so that they could begin to live into an even more profound reality than the presence of Jesus in the flesh.

We all have attachments that prevent our daily yielding to the Spirit of Jesus. Some of these attachments are troubling, like addictive, compulsive habits and behaviors. Others seem like positive traits, like hard work and pleasing others.

But good or bad, ego attachments keep us from living fully into the life of Christ which seeks expression through us. In the Ascension we let go of our fondest hopes and possessions in order to receive the very Spirit of Jesus more fully.

I'm suggesting that FOH is in the period of 40 days. We've had 50-some years of intimate life, with Jesus, with each other, and with many others who are not part of our present life. We've experienced deaths. And we've experienced new life, and always hope.

In the past year we've acknowledged that our reality has changed; we're not sure how to characterize it, but we know that we can't ever be or experience what we once were.

We are adjusting to a new reality.

Jesus word to us, as to Mary Magdala, is "Don't cling to me!" neither the precious experiences, nor the painful ones. Let them go, let them ascend.

And whatever happens...

You will not be left as orphans;

I (Jesus) am coming to you;

because I live, you will live.

The Father and I will come and

make our home with you,

through the Holy Spirit.