



Things to Ponder

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I must leave you....for a while.”

By Rev. Msgr. Kevin T. Hart

Four-year-old Marion West shouted and jumped for joy each noon when her mother came home from work on her lunch break. Her mother would pick her up at the neighbor's. They'd hurry home, eat lunch, and play together. But, inevitably, Marion would become hysterical when her mother left again after lunch, and would mope and cry for the rest of the afternoon.

One day, her mother stopped coming home for lunch. Marion was sad and wondered why her mother stopped coming. She wondered if her mother still loved her as much as she once did. Years later Marion learned that her mother still came home each noon. She sat at the kitchen window, eating her lunch and watching Marion play in the neighbor's yard. All the while she longed to be with Marion. She longed to hold her close, especially when she cried. But it was for Marion's good that she didn't.

Eventually Marion adjusted to her mother's absence and grew up in a healthy way. Looking back on those early years, Marion saw why her mother stopped coming. It was for her own good, for her own growth and development.

This story has something in common with today's Gospel (John 14:23-29). Jesus says, in effect, to His disciples, "You are sad that I tell you I must leave you. You are distressed and fearful. But I tell you, it is better for you if I go. For then my Father will send the Holy Spirit to help you grow and develop in a new way."

In other words, Jesus is telling his disciples that it's time for them to begin a new phase in their discipleship and witness to Him. It's time for them to grow and develop in a new way, and that if He were to remain with them, this growth and development would never happen.

There come times in our lives when God seems to abandon us. Take prayer, for example. There are times when we sense God's closeness to us and experience deep peace. But there are times when it seems that no one is listening and our prayer feels dry and lifeless. Or take our faith. There are times when our faith is strong enough to move mountains. At other times it seems that it can hardly move a molehill. Like Marion, we begin to wonder if God still loves us as much as He once seemed to do.

The truth is that God loves us very much. He loves us now as much as we ever

experienced that love in the past. He longs to hold us close. But He knows that it's for our own good that He sometimes seems absent to us. He knows it's time for us to begin a new phase in our spiritual growth, just as Marion did, and just as the disciples did.

It's time for us to realize that prayer can take place without feeling anything on our part. In fact, the best prayer often takes place when our heart seems to turn to stone and we have no feeling at all. When our prayer is dry, when we seem to derive no benefit from it at all, it is then that we truly pray with faith. We need to realize that faith is not a feeling. It's a commitment. It's a surrender of ourselves to God even though we don't sense His presence.

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