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OLQP

Just two weeks ago, I was helping out taking care of my Dad at home as my Mom was in the hospital with her second hip replacement surgery. My Dad's Alzheimer's disease makes it so that he can't be alone, so one night after he and I visited my Mom in the hospital we were home in his NE Philly rowhouse watching Law and Order. He asked me for about the hundredth time where Mom was, and I told him. He said he didn't know that, and I told him we were just there to visit her. He said he didn't remember. Then he asked, "Kevin, why can't I remember?" I put the TV on mute and turned to him and told, "Dad, you have a disease. It's called Alzheimer's Disease." His sad face told me that he knew what this disease meant. Then he asked, "Son, what is going to happen to me?"

My Dad's question is an important one, and I think it is one that we ask ourselves a lot when we face deep fears or when we are alone. We wonder what is going to happen to us, a central question for the disciples of Jesus as they, in fear, watched him ascend.

Luke does not seem to be so male-friendly in his writing. He starts out his two books of the Bible with men being dumbfounded. LK: Zechariah; Acts: Men of Galilee.

But before we indict them as being in a testosterone-induced paralysis, let us admit that we all buckle to fear, especially when things are not going our way or we are left alone--as is the case in both. What breaks their fear-based stillness and muteness are prayer and meeting the needs of the people in their lives with the gentle force of faith to meet them. Zechariah knows he must be a husband and father. The men of Galilee realize that their discipleship calls them beyond themselves and beyond the spot where Jesus was ascended.

Z broke his silence with these words of prayer from Luke: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, he has come to his people and set them FREE."

Free from slavery, yes. But also free from fear and abandonment and sickness and death.

In Acts, the men of Galilee get moving to the activity of discipleship, replacing the passivity of fear. They build the Church.

By caring for each other, by spreading the word, by praying and healing.

When we are stuck in place with fear, when we can't move because of our worries, anxieties, and betrayals, are we able to announce them to God, reflect on them, and then get moving with our lives as disciples, meeting the needs of those around us?

Today's feast of Ascension is not some magical moment for Jesus for us to ponder. Our imaginations need not be wasted on what it looked like or if Jesus is at the right hand of the Father, who is on the left. No, the Ascension of the Lord is not a one-time event in Jesus' life, it is an everyday experience in ours. The Ascension is not about the distance between Jesus and us; it is about the depth of our belief that there is no distance between us—ever!

We have Ascension moments when we feel stuck in our faith or doubt in our lives, and we can still pray and still move on because of the gentle force of faith that tells us our God will take care of us. We might feel alone, we might feel as if even God has left us, but we know based on past experiences that we are not alone. The Holy Spirit of the living God is not up in the sky, but right here among us. The Holy Spirit is moving within us to nudge us to be vulnerable to reach out for help, to announce a great fear in prayer, to get over ourselves and respond to the needs of our neighbors on this planet, in our neighborhood, or maybe in our families, schools, or places of work.

I would like to conclude with a brief poem by St. Thomas Aquinas called "The Pulse of God."

The limbs of a tree reached down and lifted me,
thinking I was its
child.

And in the
meadows my spirit becomes so quiet
that if I put my cheek against the earth's body
I feel the pulse of
God.

"Tell me the way you do that, birds—
enter the private chambers of my Lord."

And they all sang,
they just sang.
I gathered it was time to become a musician
and I did.

Years passed, and the sky reached down one day and lifted me;
the birds noticed and spoke,

"How do you enter the Sun like that
and know the pulse of God?"

Like Jesus, we have already been lifted up into Son of God. Like a little child has been claimed for Christ forever, so have we. Let us have the gentle force of faith to believe that we are never alone, that our God will never leave us, and that God's spirit is pulsing through our lives.