

Years ago Richard Bach wrote a best selling book called *Jonathon Livingston Seagull*. It's a fairy tale about a young seagull's growth from childhood to adulthood.

At a critical point in the story, two beautiful white seagulls appear and tell young Jonathan that it is time for him to take an important step in his life.

Jonathan hesitates, but the two birds insist, saying to him, "One school is finished, and the time has come for another to begin.

Jonathan suddenly realizes that it is time for him to leave the familiar beach and shoreline that he had become accustomed to as a young gull and to soar into the blue sky and disappear into the billowing white clouds.

Jonathan takes one last look at the beach. Then with the two white seagulls at his side, he soars into the blue sky and disappears into the billowing clouds.

Author Albert Cylwicky points out in his book "His Word Resounds," there's a striking resemblance between that dramatic episode in Bach's book and the dramatic episode in Jesus' life that we just read about in today's gospel reading

Obviously, young Jonathan resembles Jesus. He had finished one phase of his life and had to begin another. Jesus too had finished of his life and was about to begin another. Likewise, Jonathan's rising up and disappearing into the clouds resembles Jesus' raising up and disappearing into the clouds.

Whether Richard Bach intended it or not, this episode in his story helps us to understand better the significance of the important feast that we celebrate today: the ascension of Jesus into heaven.

Jesus' departure is not the end of his work on earth. It's simply the end of the first phase of it: the phase that he carried out in a material body, much like ours, visible to our eyes. Now begins the second phase: the phase that he will carry out in a spiritual body, invisible to our eyes.

The time for inaugurating God's kingdom on earth is over. The time for spreading God's kingdom across the earth is about to begin.

To put it another way, Jesus has completed his work of preparing his followers for their mission of carrying the good news of God's kingdom to the far reaches of the earth. It is now time to send the Holy Spirit upon them to empower and to guide them in this all-important mission.

This is what we celebrate today on this feast. We celebrate the fact that 2,000 years ago on the day of ascension, Jesus passed on to us, we mere mortals, the responsibility of carrying the good news of the gospel to the far reaches of the earth. We celebrate the fact that we have

been called to complete the task of building our Father's kingdom on earth; through living out as well as preaching the Gospel to the poor, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and caring for the sick and homeless.

In his book "The Song of the Bird", Anthony de Mello tells this story. He puts it in the first person to give it added impact.

He says: "On the street I saw a small girl cold and shivering in a thin dress, with little hope for a decent meal. I became angry and said to God, "Why did you permit this?" For a while God said nothing. That night he replied quite suddenly, "I certainly did something about it, I made YOU!"

De Mello's story makes the same point that today's feast makes. On the day of his ascension some 2,000 years ago, Jesus passed on to us the responsibility of completing the work that he did during his ministry on earth. That means he passed on to us the awesome responsibility of completing God's kingdom on earth. You and I, in this building today, share this immense responsibility. We are the Church, the people of God, Not one of us is exempt.

There are no deferments; no 4f's or ly's will be issued Each one of us must decide how we can best shoulder our part in this responsibility. Ready or not we are each called to be about our Father's business.

Father Keith recently asked a question in one of his homilies which I would like to ask again. If we were accused of being a Christian or a Catholic, would there be enough evidence to convict us of the charges?

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