

Fifth Sunday of Easter
Acts 14:21-27; Rev 21; 1-5a; Jn 13; 31-33a, 34-35

During the Last Supper Jesus spoke about leaving. Not surprisingly, the apostles were plunged into despair (gloom) at the prospect of losing him. They didn't want him to go. They wanted to hold onto him. It is not easy to let go of someone or something you love.

One day a young boy found a shivering little bird lying on the ground under a nest. Feeling sorry for the bird, the boy took it inside and put it by the fire, where it soon revived. However, instead of returning the bird to its nest, he built a cage for it. In the cage he gave it lots of food, drink, and warmth.

The little bird thrived and began to fly around the cage. Next it began to sing. The boy was thrilled. But one day the bird started to beat its wings against the side of the cage. The boy asked his grandfather what this might mean.

"The bird is not happy," the boy's grandfather said.

"I don't understand," answered the boy. *Hasn't it got everything it needs in the cage?"*

"Everything except the one thing the bird really wants," replied his grandfather.

"What is that?" asked the boy.

"Freedom," replied the grandfather.

"You mean, after all I have done for the bird, it wants to leave me?"

The grandfather replied, *"It just wants to be free, so that it can be a bird like other birds."*
"But how can I let it go?" the boy asked. *"It knows nothing about the dangers that wait for little birds out in the world. It might get killed or starve to death."*

"That is a risk you have to take."

"If you really loved the bird, you would let it go," replied the grandfather.

The little boy grew silent. He looked at the bird. It continued to beat its wings against the cage. With every beat of its wings, the little bird seemed to be saying, *"Set me free. Set me free!"* Unable to endure it any longer, the boy decided to let the bird go.

As it flew out the window, the bird took a piece of the boy's heart with it. The boy stared at the open window for a long time. Then all of a sudden, he heard the bird singing from a nearby tree. And for the first time in months, the boy felt free, happy, and at peace.

The apostles didn't want to let go of Jesus. But they were thinking only of themselves, not of Jesus. And Jesus told them so: *"If you loved me, you would have been glad to know that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I."* For Jesus to go back to the Father was the goal of his life. For the Apostles to try to hold him back from returning was not to show love for him.

Possessive love is very common. Some parents are very possessive in their love for their children. Having given life to them, they refuse to let their children live their life in their own way. The same thing happens in some marriages. There is reluctance to let one's partner have a life of his or her own.

Possessive love causes a lot of pain and does a lot of harm. Non-possessive love, on the other hand, does wonders for both parties.

Growth, progress, change, calls for a letting go, a losing of something which we have at present and which we value dearly. But the losing is with a view to gaining something new and better.

In leaving the apostles, Jesus made it clear that he was not abandoning them. He said to them, *"It is for your own good that I am going because unless I go, the Spirit will not come, but if I go, I will send the spirit to you."* And Jesus kept his word.

When we willingly let go of someone we love, (people) they can leave us without feeling that they are abandoning us. Then, we open ourselves to receive something new from them, something they could not give us unless they left.

- Fr. Stephen Lattner, O.S.B.