

Ascension, 2007
St. Raphael, Springdale, AR

I have been a priest now for 11 years, and I have to confess that I have loved every minute of it. But that doesn't mean that things are always easy. One of the biggest challenges for me has been being moved so often. Do you know how many parishes I have been assigned to in these 11 years? 8 different parishes! If a player in the NBA is traded that frequently, we'd think his name was Dennis Rodman. I'm starting to get a complex! And you get a little reluctant to unpack your suitcase. You figure that any day the bishop could call and reassign you to another parish. A priest friend of mine said priests should get a Winnebago as an ordination present. That way, we don't have to move from one rectory to another. We just drive up in our Winnebago and plug into the electricity and water hook-ups. And when we're transferred, we just unplug and drive off into the sunset!

But there is something positive I've learned in being moved so often, and that is not to get too attached to any given parish, not to become possessive of it. I hesitate to say, "This is my parish!" because tomorrow it may not be. I don't dare say about the rectory, "I am the king of my castle!" because tomorrow there may be another king living there. Transfer after transfer, I've learned to keep earthly things at arms length, and wait for heaven. I realize that only in heaven will I finally be able to unpack my Winnebago. You see, home it not where you hang your hat, but rather where you hang you heart, and I'm learning to hang my heart in heaven.

Today we celebrate the feast of the Ascension, when Jesus is seated in glory at the right hand of the Father. Hebrews says that Jesus has entered into the sanctuary not made by hands, that is, He has entered heaven. But that's not all. Jesus has made it possible for us to enter that sanctuary as well. In other words, Jesus' Ascension is not just about His return home to heaven, but also the good news that our true home is heaven, too. You see, heaven is where we should hang our hearts, because one day that's hopefully where we'll hang our hats.

I don't know if you've noticed this but there are a lot of immigrants in our parish. And our pastor is one of them, so you better be nice to them! It's fascinating how immigrants change their thinking after living here for many years. For instance, when my parents first came to the U.S., they had every intention of returning to India to retire. They figured they'd get a little quaint room at the Taj Mahal. You see, they considered India their real home. But when they saw their children growing up as Americans – we preferred pizza rather than curry, and rock and roll rather than Indian music, and basketball rather than soccer – they began to change their own thinking. They started seeing the United States as their own home; they began to love this country and hang their hearts here. You know, we still travel back to India once in a while for a visit – but it definitely feels like a visit because we can't wait to get back home to the hamburgers!

Folks, we all hang our hats somewhere here in northwest Arkansas. And I love to visit people in their homes: that's when I really get to know people. Everyone's home is different and says something about the family that lives there. And little children especially get excited when I come over; they always want to show me their room. By the way, Spiderman is more popular than Shrek, in case you're wondering! Our homes are special, we take pride in them, and it is where we can rest and be ourselves. But today's feast of the Ascension invites us to think differently: to begin to see heaven as our true home, to hang our hearts there instead of here. Like my parents gradually learned that the United States was to be their home and slowly let go of India, so we must discover how heaven is our true home and slowly let go of earth. Just as I have learned not to say "I'm the king of my castle!" because someday there will be another king, so we must learn not to be too attached to our homes because someday it will belong to someone else. Jesus has returned home to heaven, and He invites us to make heaven our home, too.

You know, I'm not sure if being moved to 8 parishes in 11 years is a diocesan record or not. If it's not, it should be! But I'm glad I've learned the lesson that my true home is heaven, and that's where I should hang my heart. So, I don't expect to be moved from St. Raphael's any time soon. But just in case, someone want to give me a ride in your Winnebago?

Praised be Jesus Christ!