

Sunday 31st March 2024

Easter Day

Gospel Reading

John 20.1-18

The Resurrection of Jesus

20 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. **2** So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, ‘They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.’ **3** Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. **4** The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. **5** He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. **6** Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, **7** and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. **8** Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; **9** for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. **10** Then the disciples returned to their homes.

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

11 But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; **12** and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. **13** They said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ She said to them, ‘They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.’ **14** When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. **15** Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?’ Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, ‘Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.’ **16** Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’ She turned and said to him in Hebrew, ‘Rabbouni!’ (which means Teacher). **17** Jesus said to her, ‘Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”’ **18** Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Other Readings: Acts 10.34-43 Psalm 118.1-2,14-24 1 Corinthians 15.1-11

Homily

Easter Begins in darkness

At rock bottom, when we’ve been to hell and back and are numb with grief, raw and emptied out - that is when there can be a sort of clarity, an ability to see things clearly, sometimes for the first time. Mary went to the tomb where she had seen Jesus buried, as soon as she was

allowed to after the sabbath and while it was still dark. Darkness had overwhelmed daylight as Jesus died and it smothered hope. Early in the morning before dawn took hold, Mary thought nothing more could go wrong and, in the stillness, she'd hoped to sit close to the grave and grieve. She was wrong. She discovered it could get worse. In the dark she could see that the grave had been opened, the stone rolled away and so there looked to be further desecration and indignity for one she loved.

Mary calls for help, for Peter and John. They assess the situation, go into the tomb, run off again and Mary is left alone bewildered and weeping. She summons up the courage to look into the darkness of the tomb and she sees light. Two angels, beings of light, are revealed to her in her distress. They ask her why she is weeping and in their presence she turns around. This strange moment of sheer grace gives her the light to see Jesus, though at first unrecognisable to her. She thinks he is the gardener.

For me, the heart of the gospel, the good news of Jesus, is that in Jesus, darkness, death and destruction are never the end of the story. The darkness giving way to the light of the presence of angels, as happened on Easter Day, is the turning point of many of my life experiences. To be honest, on Easter Day I find trumpets and hearty alleluias a bit bewildering. For me the presence of the risen Christ emerges like the dawn after a dreadful night, assisted by angels, human and divine.

The words said as the Easter candle is lit are: May the light of Christ, rising in glory, banish all darkness from our hearts and minds.

As we greet the risen Lord, despite and amidst the darkness and difficulties of our world, let us pray that we might have the love and courage to look in the dark places and to see Christ ever more clearly showing us the way of life itself.

Conversation Questions

1. Imagine you are Mary Magdalene. What keeps her from seeing it is Jesus she is speaking to? Can you remember times when the answer you seek is already present, but you are not ready to see and act?
2. How do you see resurrection life in your local church unfolding?
3. Is there anything else from the passage not already discussed that speaks to you? What is it?
4. What will you do this week in your Monday-to-Saturday ministry in response to what you have heard today? #everydayfaith

Prayer

Spend some time in prayer, responding to what you have heard today and listening to what God might be saying to you.

Collect of the day

Lord of all life and power,
who through the mighty resurrection of your Son

overcame the old order of sin and death
to make all things new in him:
grant that we, being dead to sin
and alive to you in Jesus Christ,
may reign with him in glory;
to whom with you and the Holy Spirit
be praise and honour, glory and might,
now and in all eternity.

(or)

God of glory,
by the raising of your Son
you have broken the chains of death and hell:
fill your Church with faith and hope;
for a new day has dawned
and the way to life stands open
in our Saviour Jesus Christ.

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