

EASTER SUNDAY

Gospel: John 20:1-9

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. 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." Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

REFLECTION 1:

RISEN AND TRANSFORMED

When God chose to enter this planet of ours as Jesus, he did it in full measure, becoming one of us even to the point of death. He was rejected, despised, abused, mocked and murdered. He suffered, died and was quietly buried. His message was like a seed buried in darkness, deep underground.

When God chose to raise Jesus from the dead, he could have done it with a choir of angels and a heavenly symphony orchestra. A stunned world would have fallen to its knees in humble rapture. But instead Jesus rose in the darkness, rolled away the stone, tidied his burial clothes and went silently into Galilee. Who we ask is this wonderful God who moved so quietly on this Easter morning so as not to disturb our sleep?

Christ is raised, alleluia! These are the victorious words we sing with gusto on this greatest of all feasts. We need to place ourselves inside the skin of those who saw what happened with their own eyes. Jesus has so impacted the lives of the people that they became radically changed. These were the very same people who had walked and talked with Jesus, witnessed his miracles and heard him utter words of mercy beyond their imagining. They believed that life could finally be different, the hungry would be fed, the poor recognised and the sinful made whole. Then this man was crucified, engineered by the religious authorities of his day. It had become instead a story of betrayal and abandonment. And then came the Gospel account we read today; 'On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning while it was still dark' (John 20:1-9). In the Gospel of John, darkness implies a lack of faith. It tells us that Mary had little faith and no hope. Then she finds the tomb empty! She's startled and runs to tell Simon Peter and the other disciple Jesus loved and together they run towards the very same tomb. The Easter story now begins to unfold in an entirely different direction - darkness gives way to light evoking a sense of victory. Jesus is alive, he has risen! He is not only alive but he is still here, still present, still among us. Only now he is with an entirely new way. He is alive in the Eucharist we celebrate, alive in the hungry we feed, alive in the gathering of two or more in his name. Mary was worried as to where Jesus' body was transferred. Today we know that answer. He is in each one of us, in our hearts, in our values, our prayers and in our reaching out to 'the least of these'. And that's why we can truly sing together with great joy: 'He has risen Alleluia!'.

REFLECTION 2:

JESUS IS RISEN! NOW WHAT?

Mary Magdalene was the first person to witness the resurrection – ‘Good things come to those who wait’. The Easter Gospel recalls the discovery that Jesus has risen (John 20: 1-9). Peter and John see that Jesus’ linen cloths are on the ground and that the burial cloth is folded and has been laid ‘in a place by itself’. After considering all this evidence, they go home. But Mary stays alone at the tomb and encounters two angels who speak to her. Then she sees a man standing there. At first, she does not know who he is, but when he speaks her name, she instantly recognises him.

This one aspect of the Gospel is filled with wisdom. It reminds us that we must first love Jesus and be willing to wait patiently for him. We must be willing to discover him appearing to us through others. We must long to hear him speak our name.

This earth-shattering, amazing truth would turn the lives of the disciples upside down and indeed change the whole world. From that moment onwards, the disciples began to understand the significance of the teachings, miracles, life and death of Jesus. He was not simply a wise man with power over nature, claiming to be the Son of God. He had conquered death, working the greatest miracle of all. He was indeed the anointed one of God, sent to save humanity.

In today’s reading from the Acts of the Apostles, we see Peter making known to Cornelius and his household that Jesus is risen, and has been appointed by God to judge everyone alive or dead. This same Jesus of Nazareth, anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power who had been doing good, curing sick people and exorcising demons and who was put to death, is alive and is of universal significance. All who believe in Jesus will have their sins forgiven in His name. What was once glimpsed in semi-darkness, early on the first day of the week, is now plainly to be seen by all, with the eyes of faith. The Lord is risen, the world is changed and the life of each believer is altered for good. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul is clear that there are real responsibilities for all ‘we have been brought back to true life with Christ’. We who live in the light of the resurrection of Jesus Christ are encouraged to keep our thoughts on heavenly things.

The empty tomb is a sign that the world has changed forever. On Easter Day, darkness and confusion give way to understanding and joy. The death and resurrection of Jesus are of universal significance – we are called to keep our eyes focused on heaven, where God willing, we will share the glory of the risen Christ.