

March 31, 2024
Easter Sunday
John 20:1-9

A very Happy and Blessed Easter to all!

Note: There are three possible Gospel readings for the celebration of Easter this year. Mark 16:1-7 is read at the Easter Vigil Mass, John 20:1-9 is recommended for Masses in the morning, and Luke 24:13-35 is an option for afternoon celebrations. The vigil Mass is usually when the new members of the community are baptized and welcomed to the Lord's Table for the first time. It is a beautiful and faith-filled celebration. However, the majority of people typically attend one of the Masses on Easter Sunday morning. Therefore, the focus here is on the text from John's Gospel.

On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they put him." So Peter and the other disciple went out and came to the tomb. They both ran, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and arrived at the tomb first; he bent down and saw the burial cloths there, but did not go in. When Simon Peter arrived after him, he went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there, and the cloth that had covered his head, not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place. Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed. For they did not yet understand the scripture that he had to rise from the dead.

Background:

This familiar Gospel may seem an unusual choice for Easter, because the Risen Lord is not encountered. Rather, the text centers on the empty tomb and the first disciples' encounter with the absence of Jesus. Belief in the resurrection for John's community was not based on their first-hand experience of the risen Christ, but on the testimony and faith of the Christian community. This is true for all of us also. Our faith journey has its beginnings on the faith and testimony of those who have come before us.

Other Gospels have the women going to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. That is not how John begins the discovery of the risen Jesus. He begins by stating that it is still dark. Mary of Magdala does not go to anoint the dead body of Jesus, but she goes to the tomb before the dawn of a new day. When she encounters the tomb with the stone moved aside, she presumes that someone has removed the body, and she goes to report to Peter and the other disciple what she has discovered. They too are in the dark about what has really taken place. The possibility that Jesus has risen is not even a consideration. By including that Mary had first believed that the body was stolen, John confronts those who suggested that the Christians' belief in resurrection could more easily be explained if it were a fact, that someone removed the body.

Throughout his Gospel, John commonly uses a lack of understanding by those who encountered Jesus as a tool for Jesus to offer further explanation that will lead to deeper faith and understanding. Think of the account of the woman at the well, the man born blind, and even Martha and Mary. Mary's lack of comprehension is not a problem because she has faith in Jesus; the understanding will continue to develop within her as it does within the early disciples. In a like manner, the text ends with the beloved disciple going into the tomb, seeing the wrappings, and believing, but not fully understanding what has taken place. More needs to be revealed for the disciples to come to fuller understanding of what has taken place.

The texts that will be used throughout the Easter season will highlight this development. Next Sunday the text will describe the disciples' first encounter with the risen Lord in the upper room. In a few weeks, the Gospel will describe the two disciples returning from the road to Emmaus.

Reflection Questions:

1. If Mary had not gone to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus, why do you think she might have gone to the tomb so early in the morning?
2. Why would you go to the tomb?
3. At the beginning of this Gospel John says that it was still dark. What do you think John meant by that simple statement?
4. Have you ever roamed about in the dark? Why?
5. Do you ever find yourself praying in the dark? Is there prayer that feels right in the dark?
6. Why do you think John tells his community that Mary of Magdala went to the tomb first? (He could have easily not included that piece of information in the text.) What does it say to you?
7. How would you feel about going into the empty tomb and joining Peter and the beloved disciple?
8. Is it possible that you are being invited today to go into a dark and empty tomb in some way?
9. Can you take some time now to talk with God honestly and openly about your situation, your feelings as you approach this Easter, and what you need God to teach/show you about the life that God desires to reveal to you?

The Gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from the readings for March 31 2024, The Resurrection of the Lord - Mass of Easter Morning

Peter proceeded to speak and said: "You know what has happened all over Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached, how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power. He went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree.

This man God raised on the third day and granted that he be visible, not to all the people, but to us, the witnesses chosen by God in advance, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commissioned us to preach to the people and testify that he is the one appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness, that everyone who believes in him will receive forgiveness of sins through his name."

This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. Let the house of Israel say, "His mercy endures forever."
"The right hand of the Lord has struck with power; the right hand of the Lord is exalted.

I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord."
The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.
By the Lord has this been done; it is wonderful in our eyes.

If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.
Think of what is above, not what is on earth. For you have died, and your life is with Christ in God.
When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory.

Or (alternative 2nd reading)

Brothers and sisters: Do you not know that a little yeast leavens all the dough?
Clear out the old yeast, so that you may become a fresh batch of dough,
inasmuch as you are unleavened. For our Paschal Lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed.
Therefore, let us celebrate the feast, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness,
but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning,
while it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb.
So she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them,
"They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they put him."
So Peter and the other disciple went out and came to the tomb.
They both ran, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter
and arrived at the tomb first; he bent down and saw the burial cloths there, but did not go in.
When Simon Peter arrived after him, he went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there,
and the cloth that had covered his head, not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place.
Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived first, and he saw and believed.
For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead.

**Excerpts from Acts 10:34, 37-43; Psalm 118:1-2, 16-17, 22-23; Colossians 3:1-4; 1 Corinthians 5:6-8;
and John 20:1-9**

Friends,

Here are the gospel background and reflection questions for Easter Sunday, March 31st, as prepared by
Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. In the gospel from John, Mary of Magdala arrives at the tomb
before daylight and finds the stone removed. She runs to tell Peter and John, who run to the tomb and find only
burial cloths. When John goes in, after Peter, he sees and believes. "For they did not yet understand the
Scripture that he had to rise from the dead."

The other readings also have direct references to the resurrection, and to the rejected stone becoming the
cornerstone. In the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, Peter says, "This man God raised on the third
day and granted that he be visible to us. To him all the prophets bear witness, that everyone who believes in him
will receive forgiveness of sins through his name." Psalm 118 declares: "The stone, which the builders rejected,
has become the cornerstone. By the Lord has this been done." In the second reading, from the letter to the
Colossians, Paul writes, "If you were raised with Christ, seek what is above. For when Christ your life appears,
then you too will appear with him in glory."

On Easter Sunday (daytime), there are two choices for readings of gospels, and there is yet a third for the vigil
mass the night before. The Easter vigil gospel is from Mark. In it, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James,
and Salome arrive at the tomb and find the stone rolled back. A young man in a white robe tells them Jesus has
been raised. He instructs them to tell the disciples, "He is going before you to Galilee." The gospel option for
Easter day mass in the afternoon is the story from Luke of Jesus appearing to two disciples on the road to
Emmaus. .

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!