

The gospel accounts of Jesus' resurrection are much like the accounts of his birth. While they are descriptions of a historical event, they are not overpowering, and they leave room to doubt that an extraordinary event or epiphany has taken place. Both the birth of Jesus and the resurrection happened in the midst of people of the day. Some experienced the event but others were oblivious. The events were also understood by some, even the most unlikely, but not by others. Among those who did not understand the significance of what had taken place were some who had the background and even the desire to witness the unfolding of God's plan in history. There were also those who would destroy the evidence of what had taken place or deny what had taken place. This is how God has chosen to work in the events of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection. No overwhelming undisputable proof, only an invitation to understand history from God's perspective.

### **Vigil Mass** - Luke 24:1-12

But at daybreak on the first day of the week they took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb; but when they entered; they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were puzzling over this, behold, two men in dazzling garments appeared to them. They were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground. They said to them, "Why do you seek the living one among the dead? He is not here, but he has been raised. Remember what he said to you while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners and be crucified, and rise on the third day." And they remembered his words. Then they returned from the tomb and announced all these things to the eleven and to all the others. The women were Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James; the others who accompanied them also told this to the apostles, but their story seemed like nonsense and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb, bent down, and saw the burial cloths alone; then he went home amazed at what had happened.

### **BACKGROUND:**

The focus of this gospel text is the empty tomb in which Jesus had been placed. The empty tomb, of itself, is not a proof that Jesus had risen from the dead. The body could have been stolen. However, if someone had taken the body, whether a disciple or a person with malicious intention, they probably would not have left the burial cloth behind and taken just the corpse. What the empty tomb also suggests is that Jesus' resurrection is not like the "coming to life" of Jairus' daughter, or the son of the widow at Nain, or Lazarus.

The women are coming to the tomb with the intention of completing the burial ritual. They, like the other disciples, seem either to have forgotten or to be unaware of the times that Jesus predicted that he would be rejected, suffer, and die, but then would rise from the dead. (Luke 9:22; 9:43b-45; 18:31-34) They did not expect to find the stone removed from the entrance and the tomb empty. The two men in dazzling garments would be understood to be angels. They both tell the women that Jesus is not here among the dead, and they remind them of what Jesus has told them of both his passion and his resurrection. The women's response is typical of one who encounters the presence of the holy: fear, wonder, and silence. Luke states that the women remembered what had been said, and then went to tell the other disciples. Luke's text is different from Mark's Gospel, where, even though the women are told to go and tell Peter and the disciples, they flee in fear. (Mark 16:1-8) When the women returned to the disciples and the others, they were not believed, because their report seemed like nonsense. Even Peter, who had gone to the tomb and found it empty, just as the women did, does not seem to believe that Jesus has been raised. He is amazed at the experience, but does not yet profess to the disciples any significance to the empty tomb.

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS:**

1. Place yourself in the room where the disciples have gathered after the crucifixion. What are some of the emotions that are present among them?
2. When you hear Luke report that two women went to the tomb with spices to anoint the body of Jesus...
3. Can you imagine yourself at the tomb being asked why you are here at the tomb with your oil and spices, looking for the body of Jesus, and being reminded of what he had said about his death and resurrection? What feelings are going through you?
4. Can you take some time to talk with God about whatever is going through you as you reflect on the gospel?

## **Easter** – John 20:1-9

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 text, also, centers on the empty tomb and the disciples' first encounter with the absence of Jesus' body. The belief in the resurrection, for John's community, was not based on their firsthand experience of the risen Christ, but on the testimony and faith of the Christian community. The faith journey of each of us depends, to some extent, on the faith and testimony of those who have gone before us.

John begins this text while it is dark. Mary of Magdala, Peter, and the disciples are in the dark about what has really taken place. Mary of Magdala discovers the empty tomb and presumes that someone has taken the body. The possibility that Jesus has risen does not seem to be a consideration. By suggesting that Mary first believed that the body was stolen, John confronts those who suggested that the Christians' belief in resurrection could more accurately be explained by the fact that someone removed the body.

Throughout his gospel, John uses the lack of understanding of those who encountered Jesus as a tool for Jesus to further explain his role. Through their lack of understanding, people come to receive further clarification, and they move toward deeper faith in Jesus. Think of the account of the woman at the well, the man born blind, and even Martha and Mary, all texts that are familiar during the Lenten season. 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. The texts that will be used throughout the Easter season will highlight that 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 on the road to Emmaus.

But this text begins with Mary of Magdala being in darkness, and ends with the beloved disciple entering the darkness of the tomb and discovering faith. Neither the beloved disciple nor Peter understands yet, but they have discovered their belief. John has described, in this text, the journey that his community has made in faith toward becoming disciples. They can all see themselves in the story of Mary Magdalene and the disciple Jesus loved.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. Do you recall a dark place or time in your own life? What are some of the things you remember about that time?
2. When you hear in this gospel about Mary Magdala, Peter, and disciple Jesus loved struggling to understand the events that are happening in their midst...
3. Can you see yourself someplace in this gospel text? What is going on within you that helps you to relate to this text?
4. When you think of yourself standing with others listening to this gospel...
5. Can you talk with God about whatever it is that seems most significant to you
6. in this gospel?

## **Easter Afternoon** – Luke 24:13-35

(This text is also the gospel text for Third Sunday of Easter)

Now that very day two of them were going to a village seven miles from Jerusalem called Emmaus, and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred. And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him. He asked them, "What are you discussing as you walk along?" They stopped, looking downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, said to him in reply, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?" And he replied to them, "What sort of things?" They said to him, "The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, how our chief priests and rulers both handed him

over to a sentence of death and crucified him. But we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel; and besides all this, it is now the third day since this took place. Some women from our group, however, have astounded us: they were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body; they came back and reported that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who announced that he was alive. Then some of those with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women had described, but him they did not see." And he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures. As they approached the village to which they were going, he gave the impression that he was going on farther. But they urged him, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?" So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered together the eleven and those with them who were saying, "The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!" Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

(The Background and Reflection questions for this Gospel will be available with the text for the 3rd Sunday of Easter.)

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](mailto:annemarie.lom@gmail.com)

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### **Excerpts from the readings for April 21 2019, The Resurrection of the Lord - Mass of Easter Day**

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