

April 12, 2020  
Easter Sunday  
John 20:1-9

*Note: There are three possible Gospel readings for the celebration of Easter. Matthew 28:1-10 is usually read at the Easter Vigil Mass, John 20:1-9 is recommended for Masses in the early morning, and Luke 24:13-35 is used for afternoon celebrations. The vigil Mass in most communities is when the new members of the community are baptized and welcomed to the Lord's Table for the first time. It is usually a beautiful and faith-filled celebration. However, the majority of people typically attend one of the Masses on Easter Sunday morning. In addition, the gospel from Luke will also be proclaimed on the Third week of Easter. 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 text may not seem an unusual choice for Easter, even though the Risen Lord is not encountered. The text centers on the empty tomb and the first disciples' encounter with the absence of the body of Jesus. The 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. Their faith journey had its beginning, like ours does, on the faith and testimony of those who had come before them.

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. When Mary discovers the empty tomb, she presumes that someone has taken the body. The possibility that Jesus has risen is not even a consideration. But by including that Mary first believed that the body was stolen, John confronts those who suggested that the Christians' belief in resurrection could more easily be explained if the fact was someone had removed the body.

Throughout his gospel, John frequently uses a lack of understanding by those who encountered Jesus as a tool for Jesus to further explain his role. Because of their lack of understanding, the people were presented an opportunity to receive further clarification and be brought to a deeper faith. Think of the accounts of the woman at the well, the man born blind, and even Martha and Mary, all texts that have been part of 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 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 on the road to Emmaus.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. At the beginning of this gospel, John says that it was still dark. How many ways might that statement be understood at this point about the early disciples? How might this also be a true statement about you or your community?
2. John does not tell us why Mary went to the tomb by herself while it was still dark. What are some of the reasons that arise in you as to why she might have done this? Are there also aspects of her behavior that are beyond explanation?

3. 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?
4. Why do you think Peter and the beloved disciple ran to the tomb? Would anything have been different if they just walked? When you think of your relationship with God, and with your community of believers, are you walking, running, standing still, backing away...?
5. The disciples encounter an empty tomb and some burial wrappings, and John says they come to believe. How might an empty tomb and some burial wrappings be significant enough experience for one to know that they are looking for life in the wrong places?
6. How will your experience of Easter be different this year because of the pandemic? What ways will it be like the experience of the dark cold empty tomb? What will be your experience of Mary who ventures out in the dark of night, or of Peter or the beloved disciple?
7. 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?

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### **Excerpts from the readings for April 12 2020, 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**