

ONE WORD

Acts 10. 34-43

1 Corinthians 15. 19-26

John 20. 1-18

I speak to you in the name of  the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Dear friends, Alleluia! Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

You see how easily that rolls off the tongue? We, who live in the year of our Lord 2019, know the joyful end of the story that began on Maundy Thursday and continued on Good Friday. But in order to truly understand today's gospel passage, we need to imagine what it felt like for those first followers of our Lord.

When Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate if he could remove the body of Jesus from the cross, tradition tells us that Christ was taken into the arms of his mother. That image has inspired some of the most exquisite works of art, including a well-known statue that one can see at St Peter's Basilica in Rome. This *Pieta* (which by the way comes from the Italian word for 'pity' and 'compassion' and the Latin word for 'piety') is a scene of dereliction, but also a scene of intense intimacy and beauty. It is only St John's gospel that tells us specifically that the Mother of our Lord was standing at the foot of the Cross with the Beloved Disciple; and like any mother, as she held the body of her only son, she would have looked closely at his tortured body, wounded and pierced, and known the finality of his death.

That same dereliction was felt by Mary Magdalene who came (alone at first, according to John's gospel) to the tomb to be with Jesus. We must remember that we look back at this story with the knowledge of the Resurrection, and we look back at it with the eyes of faith; but for Mary Magdalene, not only had Christ died, but someone

had now taken away the body; and she was devastated. Mary was distraught and through her tears was unable to take in the scene. She had been denied the chance to see our Lord's body one last time. Why did she want to see it? It cannot just have been to do those customary things that Jewish women did at the time of burial; there is a much deeper longing here. It is the longing of someone yearning to see the one who had shown her such great love, one last time, before the finality of bodily decomposition began. 'Dust thou art; and unto dust thou shalt return.'

And then: 'Mary!'

One word. And not only a word, but a name. 'Mary'. They say that hearing is the last sense to leave the body at death; our Lord spoke and, her eyes blurred by the tears, it is through hearing that Mary discovers that Jesus is not dead, but is very much alive. 'Mary!' says Christ; and in one small intimate gesture, her grief is changed to amazement and then to overwhelming joy. The gospel suggests that her reaction to seeing our Lord is to touch him; and more than that, to hold on to him. But notice, there is an urgency in the gospel narrative; there is no taking time to sit and enjoy the moment; there are things to be done, and Mary Magdalene is given a task: 'Go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."'

According to our gospel text, Mary Magdalene became the 'apostle to the apostles'. (She) 'went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.'

Everything had changed. This was no resuscitated corpse; this was the real Jesus, wounded, dead, buried in a tomb, and now risen and glorified; who was speaking about his ascension to the Father and who, on that same day of the week would

appear to his frightened disciples and breathe on them the Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of sins.

Easter Day will never fully take away the heartache that all of us experience when a loved one dies. But Easter is not about making us feel better, nor about turning the clock back, nor about reversing a certain chain of events. Easter not even about giving us something to hope for, even though it does that.

The message of Easter is about God's sovereignty over the whole created order; it is about his power to save and to change; it is about his love which is stronger than death and his power to conquer death; it is about his sacrificial love which forgives sins and welcomes the frail and mortal sinner back into his arms; it is about his grace which is freely poured out into the lives of those who believe; and it is about the God who transforms a mortal dust-filled body into a glorious life-filled creation.

What did St Peter say in our reading from Acts? 'He commanded us... to testify that (Christ) is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.' And at the end of the day, isn't that the most wonderful message of Easter? Not simply that we will be given immortality; but rather, a new resurrection body which will be marked by a life different to this current one: one that is truly redeemed, forgiven, and made whole in our Lord.

This wonderful message of Easter was revealed to Mary Magdalene in one word. The fact that Jesus called her by name was intentional; for Christ wanted her to know that this message was specifically *for her*. Today, on this glorious morning of the Resurrection, our Lord stands before each one of us and calls us by name; because he wants us to know that his Easter message is *for us*.

Dear friends, Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Amen.