

# **Easter Sunday & Octave of Easter**

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Sunday, April 9

## A MESSAGE OF HOPE

### From the 2020 Easter Vigil homily of Pope Francis

Tonight we acquire a fundamental right that can never be taken away from us: *the right to hope*. It is a new and living hope that comes from God. It is not mere optimism; it is not a pat on the back or an empty word of encouragement, uttered with an empty smile. No! It is a gift from heaven, which we could not have earned on our own. Over these weeks, we have kept repeating, “All will be well”, clinging to the beauty of our humanity and allowing words of encouragement to rise up from our hearts. But as the days go by and fears grow, even the boldest hope can dissipate. Jesus’ hope is different. He plants in our hearts the conviction that God is able to make everything work unto good, because even from the grave he brings life.

The grave is the place where no one who enters ever leaves. But Jesus emerged for us; he rose for us, to bring life where there was death, to begin a new story in the very place where a stone had been placed. He, who rolled away the stone that sealed the entrance of the tomb, can also remove the stones in our hearts. So, let us not give in to resignation; let us not place a stone before hope. We can and must hope, because God is faithful. He did not abandon us; he visited us and entered into our situations of pain, anguish and death. His light dispelled the darkness of the tomb: today he wants that light to penetrate even to the darkest corners of our lives. Dear sister, dear brother, even if in your heart you have buried hope, do not give up: God is greater. Darkness and death do not have the last word. Be strong, for with God nothing is lost!

*Courage*. This is a word often spoken by Jesus in the Gospels. Only once do others say it, to encourage a person in need: “Courage; rise, [Jesus] is calling you!” It is he, the Risen One, who raises us up from our neediness. If, on your journey, you feel weak and frail, or fall, do not be afraid, God holds out a helping hand and says to you: “Courage!”. You might say, as did Don Abbondio (in Manzoni’s novel), “Courage is not something you can give yourself” (*I Promessi Sposi*, XXV). True, you cannot give it to yourself, but you can receive it as a gift. All you have to do is open your heart in prayer and roll away, however slightly, that stone placed at the entrance to your heart so that Jesus’ light can enter. You only need to ask him: “Jesus, come to me amid my fears and tell me too: Courage!” With you, Lord, we will be tested but not shaken. And, whatever sadness may dwell in us, we will be strengthened in hope, since with you the cross leads to the resurrection, because you are with us in the darkness of our nights; you are certainly amid our uncertainties, the word that speaks in our silence, and nothing can ever rob us of the love you have for us.

This is the Easter message, a message of hope. It contains a second part, the sending forth. “Go and tell my brethren to go to Galilee,” Jesus says. “He is going before you to Galilee,” the angel says. The Lord goes before us; he goes before us always. It is encouraging to know that he walks ahead of us in life and in death; he goes before us to Galilee, that is, to the place which for him and his disciples evoked the idea of daily life, family and work. Jesus wants us to bring hope there, to our everyday life. For the disciples, Galilee was also the place of remembrance, for it was the place where they were first called. Returning to Galilee means remembering that we have been loved and called by God. Each one of us has their own Galilee. We need to resume the journey, reminding ourselves that we are born and reborn thanks to an invitation given gratuitously to us out of love, there in our respective Galilees. This is always the point from which we can set out anew, especially in times of crisis and trial, remembering our Galilee.

*Monday, April 10*

## **WHAT THE GIFT OF LOVE DOES**

**From *The Gift of Spiritual Intimacy* by Monty Williams, S.J.**

Love does not abandon anyone, and so Jesus in his resurrected state comes back to those he loves. It is significant to note that, in the scripture stories, Jesus does not show himself in his resurrected state to any but those whom he loves and who love him. Those who do not love cannot see love. They always read it as something else. But to those who love and who seek love, love comes. One of the gifts of the resurrection is that it can open us to dimensions of love we did not think possible. In Mary Magdalene's loving, we experience someone who had thought she had reached the limits of love. She grieved at the end of that love by going to the tomb. To her surprise, she finds it open and empty. On our spiritual journey to love, we come to the stage of emptiness and are asked to wait in that emptiness. When Mary waits, the Christ comes to her.

Waiting in the emptiness, as Christ experienced on the cross, removes all our preconception of how love can present itself. So when the Christ appears to Mary, she does not recognize him. She supposes he is a gardener. Christ does not appear in the drama of worldly power with pomp and circumstance and special effects. He does not seek to impress or to terrorize. He appears in a simple, ordinary way. Resurrection comes in simple, ordinary ways. When we are moving through mourning, we notice signs of new life in our ability to appreciate, perhaps even without knowing it, simple, everyday things. As you journey through a day of contemplation, try to be conscious of the effect in your life of the little things that give you joy.

Jesus goes even further in this manifestation with his friend Mary: he calls her by name. In grief we often lose a sense of who we are; we have entered a new territory where everything is strange and we have become strangers to ourselves. But when we are found by love, we are brought back to ourselves, and to a new sense of ourselves and of life. This is the gift Jesus gives Mary when he acknowledges her and calls her by name. She responds by recognizing him. This is what the gift of love does – it enables us to recognize others for who they really are. To be called by God in love gives us our new identity. To respond to that love changes our perspective and our hearts. We see with the eyes of love, and we see God in the commonplace. What before seemed insignificant now becomes worthy of notice and contemplation. When we enter into that state of contemplation, which is not just reserved for prayer periods, we discover God in all things. Here Mary discovers Jesus and embraces him.

We need to remain in that embrace and to allow that healing touch to transform us. When lovers embrace, they open their spirits to each other in mutual vulnerability. That openness has the effect of giving us courage and a sense of connection that remain whenever when we are physically separated from the beloved. We see this in little children who are loved. They are not fearful and insecure, but are filled with a sense of wonder and creativity. The same thing happens when people fall in love, and when we are touched by resurrection. We fall in love with God again in a whole new way. Like Mary Magdalene, we are tempted to hold onto that love in ways that are appropriate only to a past life. The new life love calls us to fills us with a sense of our true identity, of wonder and of creativity. We find ourselves responding to that love, as Mary did, by wanting to share it with whomever she encounters. That love does not turn us in on ourselves. It turns us to the world and to those who need to know the good news that love is stronger than death, the gift of forgiveness more powerful than any alienation, and that life is more creative than evil. It is this message Mary carries back to the disciples when she tells them she has seen and touched the risen Christ.

*Tuesday, April 11*

## **MARY MAGDALENE, A BELOVED DISCIPLE**

### **From John Pilch on the St. Louis U. Sunday Website**

In John's version of the "empty tomb" story that undergirds Christian belief in the resurrection of Jesus, it is difficult to miss the special importance John assigns to Mary Magdalene.

While Matthew, Mark, and Luke report that a group of women went to the tomb on Sunday morning, only John reports that Mary Magdalene came alone, unaccompanied by other women.

From a cultural perspective, this is very unusual behavior. A woman alone outdoors is an anomaly. Theologians believe that this is John's way of highlighting the Magdalene's special importance.

Mary's initial response to the empty tomb is to suspect theft. This is implied in her report to the disciples: "They have taken the Lord ... we do not know where they have laid him."

Twice Mary admits that she "does not know," a major theme in John's Gospel. In general, "not knowing" is not a problem in John's Gospel because Jesus can instruct these "ignorant" ones and bring them to light. This is clearly what he does with the Samaritan woman at the well and with Thomas. Mary is brought by Jesus to a very special knowledge. Jesus tells her "whither" he has gone: "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."

This special knowledge, given by Jesus uniquely to Mary Magdalene, makes her a "typical" or representative character. She can even be called a beloved disciple because she receives a special revelation. Mary Magdalene stands out as an "enlightened" person in this Gospel. She does not depend upon the group or any other person for her special knowledge about Jesus, as Simon Peter depended upon his brother Andrew. In this, Mary is very different from the ordinary folk in this Gospel.

Mary Magdalene is typical from yet another perspective. In the Mediterranean world, status is ordinarily gained by ascription. This means that people gain their status by birth or inheritance. But Mary's special status in this Gospel does not derive from an appointment by the earthly Jesus but rather from her experience of the risen Jesus.

In highlighting this aspect of Mary's experience, John is underscoring a motif that runs through his Gospel: whatever is earthly, material, of the flesh, is of no avail. The "spiritual" is important, that which is out of the ordinary.

Mary thus has spiritual status. As a typical figure, she becomes an extraordinary person.

Finally, in this Gospel the Samaritan woman at the well, Martha, a "beloved disciple," and now Mary Magdalene all receive special revelations from Jesus.

While the Samaritan woman and Martha went and called others to Jesus, they were not "officially commissioned" to do so in the same way that Jesus formally commanded Mary Magdalene: "Go to my brothers and say to them ...."

Despite their different kinds of commissions from Jesus, the three women enjoy rather high status in John's community.

Wednesday, April 12

## CHRISTIAN DE CHERGÉ ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

From Douglas P. McManaman on *lifeissues.net*

What always strikes me about the story of the road to Emmaus is that the disciples failed to recognize Jesus; while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him. What was it that opened their eyes to recognizing him? The answer is the "breaking of the bread," the Eucharist. It is Christ in the act of sacrificing himself for us, and it is the act of receiving Christ in this sacrificial act. It is an act of communion, an entering into union with him. It is not in debating that we find him, it is in prayer that we begin to recognize him where we didn't recognize him before.

This reminds me of a story of the Trappist monk, Blessed Dom Christian de Chergé, who had been the prior of the Monastery of Our Lady of Atlas in Algeria where the monks had a great relationship with the Muslim villagers. The monks served them, and the villagers would invite them to their celebrations, which the monks gladly attended. Eventually, however, the monks were kidnapped and murdered by Muslim radicals hostile to the French.

But before he was a priest, Christian was a staff officer of the French army. He was assigned to Algeria and he met Mohammed. They developed a very good relationship, but what really cemented their friendship was their common love of God. What Christian found surprising is that, with Mohammed, he could talk unselfconsciously about God, unlike in France, where talking about God made people uncomfortable. And Mohammad would challenge Christian: "You Christians don't know how to pray. We never see French soldiers praying. You say you believe in God. How can you not pray if you believe in God?" That was a question that Dom Christian says he had difficulty answering.

One day Mohammed and Christian were making their rounds through the villages unarmed when suddenly they found themselves face to face with Muslim rebels, guns pointed at Christian's chest. Mohammed stepped in front of the guns and said, "This soldier is a godly man and a friend of Muslims." The rebels withdrew without harming Christian, but the next day they found Mohammed with his throat slit, lying by a well near his home where he lived with his wife and ten children.

This event had a profound influence on Dom Christian. He said it was the act that sealed his decision to become a monk in the Atlas Mountains in Algeria. He reflected: "Mohammed had given his life like Christ. He had imitated Christ. This act is celebrated in every Eucharist where Christians memorialize the gift that Christ made of his life and where each person is invited to enter into this gift to the praise of the Father." For Christian, every Eucharist signified the gift of Mohammed's life; in other words, in the Eucharistic gift of Mohammed, he recognized the gift of Christ himself.

And, of course, in loving Christian and giving his life for him, Mohammed loved Christ. Both of them were on the road to Emmaus; both of them did not realize at first that the person right beside him was Christ. Christian discovered it in Mohammed's sacrifice, and he believed that Mohammed discovered, in paradise, that his love for his friend Christian was all along a love of Christ.

Only the heart can reach the heart of God, and it is in the heart of God that we discover who our neighbor is. Only in the heart of God do we discover that our neighbor is Christ. That's a perception that the intellect on its own is not capable of. And the problem with fundamentalists is their belief that what they see with their heads only is complete and exhaustive. But it is only within the context of his Eucharistic sacrifice that our eyes are opened, the eyes of the heart. Only through love do we come to know God who dwells within our neighbor, and if we love, we will pray, and if we pray, we enter into the humility of God. With that humility, we begin to see others as God sees them.

*Thursday, April 13*

## **THE RISEN JESUS IS DIFFERENT**

**From *He's Risen* by Phelim McGowan, S.J.**

The risen Jesus is different insofar as he does not seem to be the Jesus of Nazareth the disciples had known before his death. In fact, there is an atmosphere of unreality about him, an unreality that renders him a total stranger to them. Even when the disciples do know who he is, when he appears on the Tiberias shore, they hesitate to speak his name. Somehow he has changed. The old familiar feeling of companionship associated with knowing and being known by Jesus of Nazareth, the ordinary man of flesh and blood, has gone and, in its place, he is a man whose heart is filled with a deep sense of peace, trust and belief. Why this change? Perhaps it is due to the terrific joy that swept over his Father's face as he raised his Son to eternal life. 'Well done, my good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of the Lord. Because you have been faithful over small things, I will place you over great. Come and join in your Master's happiness.' Was it the overwhelming joy, with which the Father greeted Jesus that changed the old familiar Jesus of earth into the Christ of heaven? In his joy, a joy fully charged with the Holy Spirit, Jesus says: Abba, Father'. Jesus' prayer has reached its climax; he can enter into the heart of the psalmist's joy: 'I rejoiced when I heard them say, Let us go to God's house.' These words are fulfilled as Jesus returns home. The goal of Jesus' life is to be 'at home' with the Father and it is ours, too. As Jesus prayed to his Father through the Holy Spirit, so too, the Spirit can give us the power to hear Jesus praying, not only for his friends, but for each of us individually.

The change in Jesus could also be due to the fact that love is only complete when everything is shared with those you love. Jesus now wants to share his divinity with his relatives and friends, to show them who he really is: the Son of God. Given their religious belief of God being One, Jesus had to meet them frequently over a period of time in order to help them assimilate this amazing truth. Perhaps this is why he appeared only to his devoted followers. He was able to create in them a Christian faith, because their love for him opened them up to receive such an unexpected favour. His purpose was to allow them to see that he had entered into a completely different existence with his Father. Because they really knew Jesus, the disciples were able to understand his actions and his teachings. They realised the significance not only of what was said and done, but also what was left unsaid and undone. Jesus needed them to have this understanding so they could be his interpreters to the world. He was divine and he turned the world upside down! Through Jesus, God was finally revealed as a God who is Father, someone who is completely self-effacing, a loving father who will go after the 'lost' sheep, the depressed and the lonely. This Christian knowledge is not a purely verbal message that can be relayed to others; it is the experience of a divine relationship, a message which is intended not only to change peoples' ideas but radically to alter their lives. It is an unimaginable phenomenon. The God-made-man has become alive again in a different way. That is why the Holy Spirit has to 'remind' the disciples of all that Jesus had said to them and this is also why his Father sends the Holy Spirit on us.

Somehow this new life, this new existence with his Father, does not separate Jesus from his mortal body. Jesus is still able to eat with his friends, Thomas is able to touch his wounds, Mary can hear him speak her name. It is clear that he is still the old Jesus. The resurrection of Jesus shows that all the relationships he's had during his lifetime, all the emotions, experiences, events, growths, joys, sorrows, disappointments and so forth have made him the person he is and always will be.

*Friday, April 14*

## **JESUS PREPARES BREAKFAST**

**From an online homily of Fr. Martin Hogan**

There is something very evocative about the picture of the disciples at the beginning of the gospel reading. After Jesus' crucifixion in Jerusalem, they had returned to Galilee, back to their fishing. There they are fishing all through the night on the Sea of Galilee and catching nothing. Their failure at what they know best is somehow symbolic of their failure to follow Jesus faithfully at the time of his passion and death.

Yet, as dawn breaks over their fruitless labours, a more significant light is beginning to shine, although they are not aware of it yet. A stranger calls out to them from the shore, directing them to cast their nets again. This stranger was the one who earlier in John's gospel had said of himself, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life'.

It was only the disciple who was closest to Jesus in love who recognized the true identity of the stranger, identifying him to the others as 'the Lord'. The image of the Lord standing on the shore as his disciples floundered speaks powerfully to all of us of the Lord's faithfulness to us in our own times of weakness and failure. The Lord continues to stand on the shore of our lives even when we have not shown ourselves to be his faithful followers, even when we have failed to remain in his love.

Having called out to his disciples from the shore, the Lord then took a further, more personal, step towards them. He called them to, 'Come and have breakfast'. He invited them to share his table, as they had done many times before, as they had done at that last supper before he was crucified.

He was calling them back into communion with him. That same call goes out to each of us at every Eucharist. The Eucharist is the sacrament of the Lord's faithfulness to us in our frailty and weakness. It is also the moment when we are invited to renew our faithfulness to him and to commit again to living it out in our daily lives.

*Saturday, April 15*

## **THROUGH THE RISEN CHRIST, GOD IS CLOSE TO US**

**From *Disciples of the Risen Christ* by Cardinal Carlo Martini, S.J.**

Through the proclamation of the risen Christ, we profess, together with the early Christians, that God is the one who knows how to be close to us in our suffering, disease, failure, misfortune, and death. God does not leave us alone and does not abandon us to death if we trust in God. Jesus cried out on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" but his resurrection showed that, though apparently abandoned by the Father who did not miraculously intervene to save him, Jesus is actually loved, justified, and welcomed by God.

Although God did not perform any miracles to save Jesus from death, God is always with Jesus, on his side, and validating him. Therefore, it is not through amazingly powerful miracles, but in being with each one of us in our trials, in keeping us company even in the deep recesses of our loneliness, in being close in our distress with the hope of eternal life that God reveals to be the "God with us," the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is everywhere someone suffers like Jesus, wherever someone lives and suffers for love, for truth, for justice, for the poor; God is there to lessen the suffering of the world: this is the God of Jesus who is proclaimed by Jesus' resurrection.

Therefore, the Lord gives us a new and broader understanding of his mystery: God is not only the generative power that is revealed in the Creation of the world, but he is also the God who is revealed in the most tragic events of humanity, the God of Jesus' passion, agony, and death.

If then God is with Jesus to the point of death as shown in raising him from the dead, then we can understand the early Christians who realized how Jesus is with God in a very special way: Jesus is the Son whom the Father loved in death and beyond death; Jesus is the glorified Son; Jesus is the Son whose human nature the Father glorifies with that glory that had always been the Father's. If Jesus is the Son, if Jesus of Nazareth is with God, then we are with God, in Jesus. We are in God, and God is in us.

If Jesus, as Son, is in God and through his death, his own physical body has been glorified, even us, who believe in Jesus, are in God and our physical body carries within it the seed of the glory and fullness of being with God forever. We are God's eternal allies; God is ours because God possesses and is in us and with us in every instant of our existence.

God is in Jesus and is in each one of us just and precisely when we, like Jesus, humble ourselves; when we get closer to the least among us; when we become poor among the poor; when we imitate Jesus' lowering himself; when we imitate his ability of renouncing his privileges and demonstrations of power in order to be with the poor and the powerless. Jesus is with us and with all men and women of this world who follow consciously (and sometimes even without knowing it), the ministry of charity, of love, of service to the poor that is Jesus' way of life. Jesus is, thus, with us in all the complex and convoluted events of our human existence and in those of poor countries; he is with us in the most painful sufferings in so many parts of the world; in all the suffering, all the sorrows that lurk in the folds of our existence: diseases, failures, loneliness, divisions, anguish. Nothing is alien to Jesus' presence when, like him and with him, we rely on the will of the Father and live with love our daily existence.

Jesus is here, among us, not only as the horizon of our being Church, but as the living center of our being Church. Jesus is in us, not through the amazing power of miracles, which he used only in a very limited and modest way, but Jesus is in us with the continued, invisible, and mysterious presence of God's own mystery, of that light and almost imperceptible aura that is God's mystery, which, however, those who are born of God well understand in all the forms of expression of the presence of the risen Christ.