**The Grave Could Not Contain Him, Christ Is Risen: Let Us Seek Him Among the Living**

**Lectio Divina: Resurrection Sunday, Year A**

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 ***A brief introduction:***

      The Easter that we celebrate today with joy is not simply the commemoration of a past event, but the participation in the mystery of the passion, death and resurrection of Christ. It is no longer the Head that has to lie down on the cross to rise from the grave; it is his body, the Church, with all its members represented by each one of us. Easter teaches us that Christians in the Church must die with Christ to resurrect with him. Moreover it not only teaches it, it puts it into practice. Easter is the Christ that once died and then rose, making us die of his death and resurrect to his life.

***1) Jesus has risen indeed, and has appeared first to a woman.***

     With the celebration of Easter we not only remember the Resurrection but make it present in the joy born from the encounter with the Risen Lord. The Gospel narrative proposed by the liturgy of today helps us to understand and live it.

     It is a very linear story:  there is Mary who  is waiting for the first light to run to the tomb, finds it empty and thinks that Jesus has been stolen, and there are the Apostles Peter and John running to the tomb to see if it is true what Mary and the other women said . The love of Christ, though he was dead, persisted in them and for love they had gone to the tomb at the dawn of the new day, the first day after the Sabbath, the beginning of the new creation.

     The story of Mary continues then from chapter 11 and the following, which are not in the selected text of today because the liturgy today stops at chapter 10, but that are worth to read. However I think that it is useful first to comment the verses that come later and that allow me a consideration relevant to today.

     Having seen the empty tomb the woman is lost and shocked. In her eyes, the dead body of the Crucified was the only thing that remained of the beloved Lord to whom she had washed the feet with her tears and with a very expensive perfume.

     Then suddenly He is there beside her with his resurrected body, but Mary Magdalene does not recognize him. Lost in her thoughts and in her plan to regain the body disfigured by the passion, did she try to give a careful look to that stranger who unexpectedly sat next to her? Was she able to presume that this supposed “gardener” might be the One who had forgiven her for all the sins of a life devoted to death, making her “resurrect “ to the true life? Yes! For the woman who had experienced that the love of Jesus is greater than sin one word was enough “Mary*."* On hearing her name pronounced in the first light of dawn by a well-known voice, she recognized the risen Master. Then in her heart sprang the light and in her bloomed the faith that is to recognize the presence of the risen Christ in front of us, beside us, within us. And from that moment nothing could tear off from the heart of this woman the certainty that had taken possession of her heart and her mind.

     The Evangelist John in describing the encounter of Mary Magdalene with Jesus highlights three key aspects of the Christian faith:*the initiative, the recognition and the mission*. To the woman who is looking for a dead person Christ shows himself alive (the*initiative)*: it is the knowledge of the Risen One that does not happen, however, with a perceptual encounter. For this reason He is still a stranger. Everything changes when his presence becomes a personal call ( *the* r*ecognition*) : Jesus calls her by name and Mary responds as she had done during his earthly life : "*Rabbouni "* (  a friendly title of a Rabbi which means my teacher ) . The investiture of the announcement (*the mission*) is a consequence of the revelation: while Mary wants to touch Him, the Messiah entrusts to her, expressed in the language typical of John, the great message to take to the brothers: *"Go to my brothers and say to them: I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and you’re God”.*Christ thus made her the “apostle*to the apostles* “(St. Thomas Aquinas, Commentary on the Gospel of John, XX, 2519.10). This invitation today is entrusted in a special way to the consecrated Virgins who show how their existence is taken by the initiative of God and is experienced in the recognition of Christ who sends them on a mission in the world.

     Here today's Gospel reveals to us the secret that allows faith to be born in each of us. Faith is given to us by Jesus himself who is beside us almost in secret, without being immediately recognized by us. Jesus comes to keep us company and to light a fire in us until the moment in which we discover that it is He who is here calling us by name and we say yes with our mind and our heart.

     To our humble trusting act of faith He answers rising also in our heart.

     As the plant exposed and oriented to the light lives, so let’s orient ourselves towards the light of Christ with prayer and charity. Then Christ will come into our house giving joy, peace, life and hope, the gifts we need for our human and spiritual rebirth.

***2) Peter and John: witnesses of a fact, not of a theory.***

     Now let’s go back to the beginning of today's Gospel which stops the narrative of Mary Magdalene and, before telling her encounter with Christ, talks about the run of Peter and John to verify what the holy women reported to them and to the other Apostles.

     In the today’s narrative Peter does “only” one thing: he notes that the tomb is empty. It is not a minor thing because in this way the First of the Apostles testifies the objective fact of faith, noting that the tomb of Christ is inexplicably empty. In fact, if the body of Jesus had been stolen, the linens would be in a jumble, not folded and the shroud would not be wrapped and placed in a specific place. Peter therefore finds the objective fact: the tomb is empty and it is not a theft. The other disciple instead, Jesus’ friend, the one whom Jesus loved, seeing the same things, believes that Jesus has risen. It is underlined that the objective evidence, that the tomb is empty and that it is sure that the body was not stolen, is not enough. An explanation is needed, and it takes the love and the intelligence of the heart as well as that of the head, to believe in the resurrection. If you love a person, you know her, you experience who he or she is, and you believe and know the truth about him or her. St. Augustine write*s: “We only enter truth through charity****”***

     Since the resurrection is not a theory but an encounter with the risen Christ, we can also give a thousand proofs that Christ has risen but it is not enough because the issue is another. There are not tests or signs that are missing; then the single most reasonable explanation is that He is resurrected, but actually it is not the most reasonable one. The issue is to meet Him, and those who love Him always meet Him. To him little is enough; just a sign is enough to understand.

     The night of death is gone, the "Sun" has risen not to go down any more, and the Good has triumphed over evil. Where the crime had abounded, grace now abounds. The joy of Christ soothes every pain and we can say with quiet confidence with Psalm 57: “My*heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast. I will sing and chant praise: Awake, my soul, Awake lyre and harp, I will wake the dawn “(*8-9).

     The initial lack of faith and misunderstanding that involved Peter and John was also in Mary Magdalene. To recognize the Risen Christ , in fact,  it is not enough the sheer physical and rational knowledge , but it is necessary the path in faith that in Mary  happens only when  she is called by name in a dialogue of profound intimacy, narrated by John in a truly touching way. The appearance is preceded by a vision of angels, almost in disbelief for the sadness of the woman (why*are you crying?*), to whom Mary weeping explains that they have taken her Lord. It is significant that John "paints" the position of the two angels "*sitting, the one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been* “. It is an image reminiscent of the Ark of the Covenant, as if to say that every Old Testament prophecy has now been fulfilled in ​​the empty tomb, the testimony of the risen Christ.

     The Resurrection of Jesus is God's yes to Christ and to us, because in raising the man Jesus, God has resurrected humanity and has recreated a new heaven and a new earth. Not the idea of ​​Christ returns but Christ in flesh, as an immortal and transfigured body.

      While praising the faith of John, illuminated by love, followed certainly also  by that of Peter, the Evangelist seems, however, to reproach  that "delay" to understand the great truth ( *yet they had not ( so far )  understood the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead*) . True faith, in fact, is the one which entrusts itself totally to God's word and doesn’t look for witnesses or some evidence of trustworthiness like the empty tomb. All this is due to the perennial unpreparedness of humanity in front of the mystery of God.  In the light of all this, the "seeing" of John becomes a witness and a commitment of faith and life for every true Christian who wants to embark on the difficult journey toward eternal salvation. As put by the Protestant theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Easter is an intervention of God from eternity. It is a prelude of ultimate things, those that occur when the final fulfilment will be made, and of those ones it can be possible to talk about only in pictures or parables. Easter reveals all the glory and the power of God. He is the master of death, not only that of the Son, but also that of every human being. In the same way He has raised Jesus, He will bring His holy people from death into life.

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Roman Rite

Acts 10: 34a 37-43; Ps 118; Col 3:1-4; Jn 20: 1-9

Ambrosian Rite

Actt 1:1-8a; Ps 117; 1Cor 15:3-10a; Jn 20:11-18

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Patristic reading

St. Gregory of Nazianzus

Let us meditate on these words of St. Gregory of Nazianzus:

*"We want to certify to you Sons and Brothers, and to the many that of the glory and hope of the Christian name are covered in the world, that Christ even today is in the history of the world, even today more than ever, Christ is alive, Christ is real. Alive and real, not in the shadows of doubt and uncertainty ... Christ is present. Time does not contain and does not consume Him. History evolves and can change the very face of the world. But his presence lights it... He is the joy of the earth; He is the doctor of all human infirmities. He personifies every man who suffers; until there will be pain on earth, He will take it on himself to raise the energy of compassion and generous love. Jesus, therefore, is always and everywhere present ... He is the Master, Brother, Pastor, Friend of each one of his people, the Savior of every single human being who has the good fortune to be associated with Him as a cell of the mystical Body, of which He is the head. Each one is allowed to call him by name, not as a character alien, distant inaccessible, but as the "YOU" of the supreme and only love, as the Bridegroom of his own happiness that mysteriously is closer than all that seek him can imagine, as it has been said, “be consoled, you will not be looking for me, if you had not already found me."*

These words are a heartfelt prayer that we can now make ours in joy.