

GOSPEL*John 20:1-9*

It was very early on the first day of the week and still dark, when Mary of Magdala came to the tomb. She saw that the stone had been moved away from the tomb and came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved. 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb' she said 'and we don't know where they have put him.'

So Peter set out with the other disciple to go to the tomb. They ran together, but the other disciple, running faster than Peter, reached the tomb first; he bent down and saw the linen cloths lying on the ground, but did not go in. Simon Peter who was following now came up, went right into the tomb, saw the linen cloths on the ground, and also the cloth that had been over his head; this was not with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in; he saw and he believed. Till this moment they had failed to understand the teaching of scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

HOMILY OF POPE FRANCIS*16 April 2017*

Today the Church repeats, sings, shouts: "Jesus is Risen!". But why is this? Peter, John, the women went to the Sepulchre and it was empty. He was not there. They went away with their hearts closed in sadness, the sadness of defeat: the Teacher, their Teacher, the One whom they loved so much had been put to death; He is dead. And there is no return from death. This is the defeat. This is the path of defeat, the path towards the sepulchre. But the Angel says to them, "He is not here, He is Risen".

It is the first announcement: "He is Risen". And then the confusion, the closed hearts, the apparitions. But the disciples stayed locked in the Upper Room the entire day because they were afraid that what happened to Jesus would happen to them. The Church does not cease to say before our losses, our closed and fearful hearts: "Stop, the Lord is Risen". But if the Lord is Risen, why is it that these things happen? Why is it that there is so much adversity: illness, human trafficking, human slavery, war, destruction, mutilation, vengeance, hatred? Where is the Lord then?

Yesterday I phoned a young man with a grave illness, an educated young man, an engineer, and while talking to him, to give him a sign of faith, I said: "There are no explanations for what is happening to you. Look at Jesus on the Cross. God did this to his Son, and there is no other explanation". And he answered: "Yes, but He asked His Son and the Son said 'yes'. I was not asked if I wanted this". This moves us. None of us is asked: "Are you happy with what is happening in the world? Are you willing to carry this cross further?". And the Cross goes forth and faith in Jesus comes down from it. Today, the Church continues to say: "Stop. Jesus is Risen". And this is not a fantasy. The Resurrection of Christ is not a celebration with many flowers. This is beautiful, but this is not it. It is something more. It is the mystery of the discarded stone which becomes the foundation of our existence. Christ is Risen. This is what it means.

In this throwaway culture where what is not needed is just used and disposed of, where what is not needed is thrown away, that stone — Jesus — the source of life, is discarded. And with faith in the Risen Christ, we too, pebbles on this earth of pain, tragedy, acquire meaning amid so many calamities. The sense to look beyond, the sense to say: "Look, there is no wall; there is a horizon, there is life, there is joy, there is the cross with this ambivalence. Look ahead, do not close within yourself. You pebble, acquire meaning in life because you are a pebble near that rock, that stone which the evil of sin discarded". What does the Church tell us today before so many tragedies? Simply this: the discarded stone is not really discarded. The pebbles which believe and stick to that stone are not discarded. They have meaning and it is with this sentiment that the Church repeats from the bottom of Her heart: "Christ is Risen".

Let us think for a while, each of us, think about the daily problems, the illnesses we have been through or of one that a relative has; let us think about wars, human tragedies and with simplicity, with a humble voice, without flowers, alone, before God, before us, let us say, "I do not know how this is, but I am certain that Christ is Risen and I have put a wager on it". Brothers and sisters, this is what I wanted to say to you. Go home today repeating in your hearts: "Christ is Risen".

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



Head: What do the details in the Gospel — the empty tomb, the folded cloths, and the quiet observation of the disciples — reveal about the moment when the beloved disciple “saw and believed”?



Heart: When faith requires trust before everything is fully explained, do I remain open to believing like the beloved disciple, or do I tend to hold back until I feel completely certain?



Hands: How can I live this week with the quiet confidence that Christ is risen — allowing that hope to shape how I face difficulties, uncertainty, or fear?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another:

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. “Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray”)
3. Offer prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others’ prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps praying the ‘Glory Be’.