

Easter Sunday – April 20, 2014

Prepared by Christine Perrier, former Maryknoll lay missionary, Peru

Acts 10:34a, 37-43; Psalm 118:1-2, 16-17, 22-23; Colossians 3:1-4 or 1 Corinthians 5:6b-8; John 20:1-9

We begin this day in the darkness, with Mary of Magdala ... a pre-dawn darkness that is slowly transformed by the emerging light. The resurrection account of St. John which we contemplate this Easter morning is not marked by noisy earthquakes and power, so as to convince the world of its truth. Rather, it occurs in silence ... darkness ... weakness ... searching ... process. It is not announced; rather, it is discovered, slowly, like the emerging dawn reveals what was hidden by the darkness.

The tomb is a key element in all the Gospel accounts of the resurrection. It provides the necessary link to the death of Jesus, and allows us to understand more deeply the resurrection as a transformation of death and the radical option for life. Yet faith in the Resurrected Christ did not come automatically for the disciples, and should not be “automatic” for us. First we have to go to the tomb, and allow ourselves — our judgments, our weaknesses, our pain, our illusions — to be transformed.

At seeing the stone removed from the tomb, Mary does not proclaim that Jesus is risen ... she runs in fear that someone has stolen his body. Still grieving the death of the person who changed her life, she misinterprets the empty tomb. She recognizes, however, that she needs the community to live this process, to be able to return to the tomb and confront what it may teach her.

We, too, are summoned to the tomb — the place where we bury that which has been crucified *in us* — and, as the beloved disciple, bend down, a gesture of prayer and holy reverence toward this place of death; so that when we go into the tomb, our senses are alert, our eyes open to see and our heart broken open to receive the grace present there. Seeing — insight — and believing ... yet not understanding. Our faith and belief in the Resurrection begins in the heart, not in the head.

In the year 2000, the 20 years of terrible political violence was ending in Peru, leaving in its wake 70,000 people — mostly rural indigenous — dead or disappeared, and an innumerable population deeply affected physically, emotionally, economically, spiritually, and culturally. That same year, a group of committed lay people and religious founded the non-profit association Center of Spiritualities-EMAÚS in Puno, impelled by the desperate needs of those affected by violence, who long to reconcile, heal and trust in life once more.

EMAÚS provides the ministry of listening and accompaniment to people who seek help to confront difficult issues; yet the problems of today are complicated by painful or powerful experiences buried deep inside that prevent one from living fully and freely. Ordinary people who have been trained in the approach of EMAÚS provide this personalized “face-to-face” attention, listening with gentleness and compassion to the wounds that one has tried to forget; never judging nor forcing, nor offering solutions.

The mystic component of accompaniment is centered in being a reflection of the resurrected Christ who lives within the depths of the person — humbly inviting him or her to enter the tomb of their wounds; to roll up the burial cloths that have kept them silent, bound to structures of violence, or limited by their past; and to reconcile and heal the suffering so that they can make decisions that allow them to live more fully and freely. In the “method” of accompaniment promoted by EMAÚS, no one is without wounds; thus, in order to minister to another brother or sister, we must be ministered to and enter our own tombs to experience the healing of the resurrected Christ deep within.

What do we bury? What tombs need to be opened in our life? Anguish of seeing a loved one tortured or killed ... Deception of having hopes dashed ... Pain of a ruptured relationship ... Mary of Magdala, Peter, and the beloved disciple also had these deep wounds. Perhaps if we contemplate the resurrection accounts in the gospels from this angle, we may be able to move from a routine celebration of Easter to a real experience of the resurrection within our own lives.

Even after eating and drinking with Jesus after he rose from the dead, Peter still needed to be transformed by what this resurrection really means. His proclamation in the first reading comes after a deeply moving realization that Christ has risen for all people, not just for Jews, nor just for Christians. God has anointed Jesus Christ as the one who can heal the oppressions that take hold of us, and lead us to from death to life, from division to reconciliation, from fear to hope.

The second reading proclaims: we too have died and our life is now intimately hidden with Christ in God, but when we are raised with Christ — resurrected — we will appear with him in glory. *The glory of God is the human person fully alive.* (St. Iraneaus). To be fully alive, we need to “clean house,” to clean out the old yeast that still ferments in the stale dark tomb, and replace it with sincerity and truth.

Our world is deeply wounded — by violence, by greed, by broken relationships and resentments. The Word became flesh within this brokenness, as the prologue of John’s gospel expresses; so too the Resurrection becomes incarnated in our lives, and makes its dwelling within and among us. Only when we experience this, can we understand the Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead to give us the grace and truth to shine in the darkness. This truly is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in his enduring mercy that gives us life. Alleluia!

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