

Reflection Easter Morning Readings 2020

By Jim Casey

Acts 10:34-43

Colossians 3:1-4

John 20:1-18 (expanded from Jn. 20:1-9)

"I have seen the Lord." Mary Magdalene to the Apostles -John 20:18

There is a rhythm to the Church year. The quiet, reflective, preparation of Lent fit this year well. Lent seemed longer. By Ash Wednesday, we began to realize the pandemic was going to be bad for the whole world. The Stations of the Cross service on March 11 was wonderful. It was the last live program held at St. Vincent's until further notice. By then the scope of the disaster was apparent. Those of us not exempt from stay at home orders had plenty of time for reflection. We pondered our personal sins and our society's sins. I for one prayed more than I have ever prayed.

Holy Week was completely different. No Palm Sunday procession. No Tenebrae. The Seder, the Holy Thursday service, Good Friday service, the overnight vigil – all were gone. The Easter Vigil Service and the Easter Sunday Mass were canceled. Father Chase and the crew that live-streamed the services did a great job, but YouTube is a poor substitute for participating in the liturgy. Holy Week was different. It was successful in its own way, but it was a personal experience. I felt a sense of mourning and loss.

And yet, today is Easter. **Jesus Christ is risen! Alleluia!**

In today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles, Peter proclaims Jesus' death and resurrection. He preaches the good news. God sent Jesus to all nations. Jesus told us that all who believe in God will have their sins forgiven through his name.

In the second reading, from Colossians, Paul tells us that our old life is dead. Our new life is hidden with Christ in God. What an extraordinary image that is. We are hidden with Christ in God.

The Gospel is Easter as John tells it.

This year I am participating in a Jesuit retreat based on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola. One of techniques St. Ignatius uses is to ask the retreatant to

put herself in the place of one of the people in a scripture reading. From that perspective, you are encouraged to use your imagination to re-tell the scripture story. Mary Magdalene is a central person in today's Gospel. I'm going to imagine her experience of the Resurrection.¹

Mary was with Jesus from early in his public ministry. In an early miracle he drove seven demons out of her. She and other women travelled with Jesus and the male disciples. In fact the women supported Jesus and the others.

Ever since he cured me, I knew Jesus was God's messenger. He treated us women with respect. He counted us among his disciples. Jesus was mesmerizing when he spoke. I can recall every word of many of his teachings. Jesus taught us to love one another and to care for one another. He said that people are more important than laws. Laws should be kept to do God's will and to bring his people closer to God. They weren't created to allow some people to place a burden on others. I committed myself to Jesus. I was committed to following his teachings. We were going to change everything. Jesus was the Messiah.

Jesus told us that we would have to pay a heavy price to follow him. He warned us that he would suffer and die. I chose not to believe it. If you heard what he said and saw what he did, you would understand. I would do anything for that man. If he asked me to sacrifice my life for the good of the others, I'd have done it gladly. I knew there was no obstacle he couldn't overcome. There were no odds he couldn't beat.

But I was wrong. He's gone. His followers have fled.

I watched them crucify Jesus. I stayed with him the whole time. Except for John, only the women stayed. I didn't want to see him suffer and die, but I just couldn't leave. I watched them take him down. I followed Joseph and the others to the tomb. I stayed at the tomb after everyone else left. I don't know what I was thinking. I didn't want to leave him alone.

While I was keeping vigil, I thought about the whole time I was with Jesus. I thought about how happy he made me. I thought about all my hopes and dreams. We were going to change everything. There would be justice. There would be peace. All the exploitation would end.

¹ This meditation will cook up what Fr. Lawrence would call a Gospel stew. The Mary Magdalene references come from each of the four gospels.

That vision of a new world is over. Jesus is dead. My hopes and dreams are crushed. Nothing has changed. I don't know what I'm going to do.

My vigil that night was two days ago. Really, it was only a day and a half. It seems like a lifetime. It's still dark, but I know the way to the tomb. I want to get there before daybreak.

Oh no! The stone has been moved; the tomb is empty. I've got to tell the others.

I find Peter and John. We run back to the tomb. They run faster than me. The tomb is empty. The said the burial clothes were neatly arranged.

They went back. I'm still here. Let me look.

"Woman, why are you weeping?"

"They've taken my Lord. I don't know where they have laid him."

"Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?"

"Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you laid him, and I will take him."

"Mary!"

"Rabbouni!"

Hearing just one word, in one millisecond, Mary went from broken heartedness and desperation to unbridled joy. This is the Resurrection.

This is the joy of those who are rescued when they are on the verge of giving up. This is the joy of those who triumph after a long period of suffering.

Jesus is alive! He has conquered death! We are saved!

We are all frightened today. We know this pandemic is going to be bad. We just don't know how bad. We know it will last a long time. We just don't know how long. We can worry about that tomorrow.

Today we celebrate Easter. We celebrate the Resurrection. We celebrate Jesus' triumph over death. Jesus Christ is risen! Alleluia!