

20. April 2025

THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN

“The empty tomb”

Jn 20:1-10

Now on the first day of the week Mary Mag'dalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. So she ran, and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” Peter then came out with the other disciple, and they went toward the tomb. They both ran, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first; and stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; he saw the linen cloths lying, and the napkin, which had been on his head, not lying with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not know the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to their homes.

It is accomplished: Christ is risen! He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia! This cry of joy resounds throughout Christendom and gives it hope, hope in difficult times when it seems to be fading, because the resurrection of Christ is the visible sign of the victory over hell and death: “O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?” (1 Cor 15:55).

In Jerusalem, the Holy Fire, which to this day miraculously descends to the tomb of Christ at Easter, is joyfully carried through the streets and taken into every house that opens to it. A warm glow then spreads over the Old City. Christ is risen! -they say to each other. It is as if a breath of the Lord's victory is in the air.

Jesus' disciples still had a way to go before they had understood what had happened on that resurrection morning. They were still in darkness. They were still shaken and grieving over the death of their Lord. What will happen now after His death? Jesus was in the tomb.

Mary Magdalene had rushed to the tomb. No doubt her love for Jesus had roused her so early in the morning to go to honour and mourn Him. But she found that the stone had been rolled away. She suspected that someone had taken Jesus' body. Where would they have put Him?

Surely Mary Magdalene had heard Jesus speak of His resurrection. His words were known to all the believers, and they must have talked among themselves about what He had spoken, but without yet fully understanding it. Mary, unable to interpret the meaning of this first sign, hurried to tell Peter and John.

They both ran to the tomb. The Gospel tells us that John arrived first and saw the linen cloths, but he did not enter the tomb. When Peter entered, he saw that the shroud was in another place. Then John also entered the tomb and, as the Gospel says, "saw and believed".

With his loving heart, John must have begun to understand, even if the full reality of the Resurrection was not yet revealed to him through the testimony of Scripture. But his heart already felt it and perhaps even knew it. John saw with his heart, and true love is often quicker than understanding. It has "direct access" to reality, whereas reason often requires a longer process.

What happened inside the two disciples, did they return home with a shy hope and pass it on to others? Perhaps the light that had begun to manifest itself in John's heart also touched Peter. We do not know. But it is possible that it did.

In any case, the Gospel simply says that they "went back to their homes". But they had already been in contact with the event of the resurrection. They had seen the empty tomb, the linen clothes and the shroud. Where would their Lord be?

Very soon Jesus Himself will give them the certainty by showing Himself to them. Then He will make them witnesses of His resurrection and they will carry this message to others so that they will believe and be saved. It is only a short time away!

In the meantime, the loving Mary Magdalene, who had returned to the tomb to mourn Jesus, will be the first to see the Risen One. What immense joy!