

Reflection on Mark 16:1-7 (Vigil Gospel)
EASTER SUNDAY - Year B - 5th April 2015

Throughout the liturgical year Jesus has been there with us in every Sunday Gospel, teaching us, challenging us, challenging religious leaders and structures, weeping for us and with us, Loving us, reaching out to us with compassion and mercy – Jesus has faithfully journeyed with us. But in this particular Easter Gospel of Mark we notice that Jesus' presence is absent. Jesus is not where we expected him to be and we are confused and bewildered yet again. The resurrection is certainly implied by the *young man* but is not yet experienced, understood or evident to his followers. What then does all this mean for us and are we any the wiser today?

As we know the meaning of the word Easter is associated with *new life – new beginnings*. It seems as Christians we can readily accept that the resurrection was something that happened to Jesus, but perhaps we do not so readily understand or accept that this too is a journey that we are part of ourselves, now, and not just when we physically die. It is a journey we must enter into ourselves and as a community. But we can tend to think (and many of us were taught) that Jesus did all this so that when we physically die Jesus has won for us a place in *heaven* and all we have to do is follow the Church – in other words conform and you will win *heaven*. This is a very corrupted understanding of who we are and who Jesus is. The only one we must follow is Jesus.

This Easter journey of Jesus is for all of us to **live now** not just to remember at our various liturgies. Jesus cannot live our lives for us but will most certainly walk *before us* and with us all the way when we give this *new life – new beginning*, our conscious 'yes'. To give our 'yes' means that we must be prepared to enter the *tomb* just as *Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James, and Salome* did, and Jesus did. When we surrender our whole selves, holding onto nothing and trusting with every part of our being, we are entering this *new life – this new beginning*. But first we enter the *tomb* – that place between death and Life – that place of Mystery that Jesus was so aware of. For many who open into this experience it can *feel* as though Jesus is absent and the aloneness of it can be a fearful experience. But if we *listen* in this darkness, we too will hear that voice those three women heard assuring them: *There is no need for alarm*. This voice too will most surely guide us to where and how to *look* for Jesus the Christ, even though we are now unsure of what it is we are looking for.

Jesus teaches us who we truly are and what it is to open into this *new life*. But then we are responsible to respond to this life, death and resurrection of Jesus by entering into our own lived experience of it. When we open into entering the *tomb* and into the darkness (which is the journey into faith) we will be guided every step of the way even though initially we may be somewhat confused. This is the Easter message. It is saying to each of us today that now is the time to emerge from our sleep and enter into this Mystery. Nothing will be as we expected it to be but it will be beyond anything we could have ever imagined. This is where Jesus longs to bring us. The only way we can do this is to enter the darkness with complete trust and openness.

Every time we walk into our fears and dare to Love in that dark place we experience a death and resurrection however large or small. Jesus continually walked into his fears and continued to Love through them which enabled him to eventually face the crucifixion. He had absolute faith in God even though he didn't always understand what was happening. This was very evident when he cried out: *my God, my God why have you abandoned me?* Jesus then says to each of us: *come follow me into new life*. How impossible this can feel for us at times as we get caught in our failures to Love, but it is what Jesus asks us to believe and to experience.

There is no religion on earth that can do any of this for us or take the place of our own responsibility to give our 'yes' to Jesus. Religions can point the way and meaningfully ritualise the experience but ultimately it is our own awakening journey into the Wholeness we are. Death is the most solitary of journeys and yet at the same time it is the most unifying. Jesus teaches us that so profoundly. Through every death we enter into, we experience a deeper Wholeness, which means that our world comes another step closer to becoming Whole instead of fragmented and divided. As long as we rigidly hold onto and justify our fears, our resentments, our pride, our ego's, our judgements, our hatreds, our greed, our selfishness and self-centredness, our retaliations, our unforgiveness, our expectations, our rejections, our war mongering, etc we are rejecting this call from Jesus to *new life*. There may be times when we weep and weep over our own inability to Love within all these areas and where it feels impossible to live what Jesus asks of us. At these times we are held in great Love with Mercy and Compassion and this Spirit of Love will teach us and grow us in Love. This desire to grow in Love is enough for God, and God will show us a way through it all however impossible it may seem for us. The women in today's Gospel desired to find Jesus and that was all that was needed. The Spirit did the rest.

As we search for Jesus the Christ are we prepared to enter the *tomb* and experience the darkness of faith in order to emerge into our *new life and new beginnings*? Are we prepared to die to all that is not Love within us? Jesus is the Light in our darkness and will lead us out of the *tomb*. Are we truly open to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and the *new life and new beginnings* this means for us?
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