

Christ is risen from the dead,  
Trampling down death by death,  
And upon those in the tombs bestowing life!

Dearly Beloved,

Today we celebrate the Feast of feasts, the origin of our faith, the reason for our hope, the rising from the dead of the One Whom we love and Who loves us and has given Himself for us. Today the whole world rejoices, both rational and irrational, the angels proclaim the news, the sun and moon shine more brightly, the birds sing, the trees and flowers begin to blossom, and the blessed of mankind who believe in His Resurrection glorify Christ as we do this morning.

The Gospel is taken from St. Mark and ends with the women leaving the tomb with an angelic message for the Apostles. It is brief, but it has plenty for our contemplation this day. Above all, it presents to us two figures for our encouragement and consolation, Mary Magdalene and Peter.

Magdalene was one of the faithful women who had accompanied Our Lord throughout His public ministry; having been converted from a sinful life, she loved him immensely. When the events of His Passion began to unfold, she, together with Our Lady and a few other women, followed Jesus through each stage of it as much as they were allowed by the Jewish and Roman authorities. Magdalene walked with Him to Calvary and then adored Him on the Cross as He suffered His last agony and died. She went with Joseph of Arimathea as he buried her Lord, and then came back the next day as soon as possible to anoint His sacred body.

Mary Magdalene is to be praised for her fidelity and for her love. Despite the threats and cruelty of the men who brought about Jesus' death, she was always near Him, praying for Him and offering what signs of love she could so that He would know He had not labored in vain in freeing souls from the devil. She is the image of those of us who have offered a faithful Lent, one spent with Our Lord in penance and generosity.

Peter was also a faithful disciple of the Lord, having been chosen by Him when He first began His public ministry. He defended Jesus and His teaching and even professed Him to be the Son of God. But after Judas had betrayed Jesus and He was on trial, Peter was asked by a woman at the fire if he was with Christ, he denied it vehemently, and fulfilled the prophecy of Our Lord, despite his boasting at the Last Supper that “Although all shall be scandalized in thee, I will never be scandalized... though I should die with thee, I will not deny thee.” And he ran away and wept, too ashamed and afraid to show himself again, leaving Christ to die on the Cross without him.

Peter, then, is an image of those of us who were unfaithful during Lent; who planned great things but did not act upon them with fidelity; who spoke many words but did very few deeds. In this way, Magdalene and Peter are also signs not only of the soul in Lent but during our entire lives. Some are quietly faithful, who say few words but love ardently and consistently; others say much but do little. But this, as we know, was not the end of Peter, for Jesus told him He had prayed for him that His faith would not fail.

And that is why the angel’s message today brought them both such joy. Because of her undying love, Magdalene was privileged to see the empty tomb and hear the angelic proclamation of the Resurrection. Not only that, we know also from John’s Gospel that she returned to the tomb after telling the Apostles, and Jesus appeared to her, consoling her whose heart burned such that she could not rest until she had seen Him. As Gregory the Great says, “Holy desires increase by delay in their fulfillment; if delay causes them to fail, they were not desires. Anyone who has been able to reach out for the Truth has been on fire with this love. For this reason David has counseled us, saying: ‘Seek his face always.’ And again the Church says to Jesus in the Song of Songs, ‘I have been wounded with love.’”

Why did Magdalene’s message from the angel give Peter joy? Because the angel mentioned him by name, and this, of course, by the direct will of Jesus himself. For if Peter had not heard his name, he would not have had the courage to approach the Lord again. See how wonderful is the gift of divine forgiveness! We are ashamed to approach Him after our infidelity, and so He reaches out to us by subtle gestures, beckoning us to come back to Him. Peter had wept and repented of his sin, and the Lord, who sees our hearts, gave him knowledge of his forgiveness through the angel. Not only did Peter run with John to see the empty tomb, we know from Luke that Jesus appeared to him alone on the same day He had appeared to Magdalene while she was alone. The power of His resurrection rewarded the fidelity of the one and erased the infidelity of the other.

So today, whether we be like Magdalene or Peter, let us rejoice this day, and let no worldly sadness weigh us down. Christ is risen from the grave, and we with Him. The lover of mankind has died for love of us, and now lives again that we might have hope. He has chosen us out of this confused, unbelieving, dying world so that we may be its light and save ourselves and any who will listen to the angelic message. We are blessed, dear friends, for those who know the truth and the power of Christ's Resurrection are truly blessed and chosen by God. May we rejoice this day to receive His Body and Blood into our souls and thank Him with all our hearts for His love for us.

Today we have the privilege also of celebrating two First Holy Communions, eminently fitting, for Christ feeds us not with His flesh dead on the Cross, but with His glorified body, reigning triumphant in heaven. Let us be glad for Magdalene and Micah and rejoice for them and with them to receive His Body and Blood into our souls, thanking Him with all our hearts for His love for us.

“O Death, where is your sting? O Hell, where is your victory?”

Christ is risen, and you are overthrown!

Christ is risen, and the demons are fallen!

Christ is risen, and the Angels rejoice!

Christ is risen, and Life reigns!

Christ is risen, and not one dead remains in the tombs!

For Christ, being raised from the dead, has become the first-fruits of them that slept.

To Him be glory and dominion through all the ages of ages! Amen!