

[Spirituality](#)



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First of all, let me extend to everyone my own prayers for you and your family and friends that you have a very joyful, beautiful, blessed Easter — the day when we can feel like, I think, connected in a special way with those who have gone before us, perhaps someone we have lost in the past year especially, which we feel so deeply. They're living in the fullness of life, which we all are coming to. So we think about them and pray for them, with them, perhaps especially for all of us, Father Pete who died during this past year, and so happy Easter to all.

Easter Sunday

[April 1, 2018](#)

Acts 10:34a, 37-43

Psalms 118

Colossians 3:1-4

Mark 16:1-7

But now for a few moments, it's important to reflect on our scripture lessons. If there's one thing you can say about the accounts of the resurrection, it's that the disciples, the communities who composed the scriptures — the apostles and the other disciples — did not get together and plan how to present this teaching. It's not a made-up story. You can tell because in the different accounts in the four Gospels, there are many contradictions. It was such an inexplicable event that they didn't know how to talk about it, and they talked about it in different ways and didn't plan somehow to tell a story that would be persuasive with all the evidence. You could pick their stories apart.

But as we listen today in this account of John, we perhaps can get, I think, the deepest meaning of what the resurrection means for us. John tells first of all about Mary Magdalene. She comes to the tomb early in the morning; it's still dark, in fact. You remember that Mary Magdalene was a very special friend of Jesus. She loved him with unconditional love; he loved her. But Mary Magdalene was totally confused when she saw the empty tomb: "They've taken his body away and we don't know where they put it." She's upset and she runs to Peter and the other disciples. Then

Peter and John come and they go to the tomb and a strange thing happens, if you listen carefully.

John, obviously the younger disciple, runs ahead of Peter. He's so anxious to get there that he runs out in front and gets there first. But then out of respect for Peter, who was acknowledged already as the leader of the group, John waits. Peter goes in and is puzzled; he can't quite understand anything. He noticed how all the linen clothes are laid aside carefully, wrapped and so on, but then he leaves. Then you notice what the Gospel says about John. He goes into the tomb. He looks around and it says, "He believed." He experienced immediately the force of the risen life of Jesus.

I'll talk about Mary Magdalene again. In the Gospel for today, it ends at that point where Peter and John have entered the tomb. John believes; Peter is still in disbelief or confusion. But then John in the Gospel goes on to say,

"Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. (Her heart is broken.) But then as she wept, she bent down to look inside. She saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head, and the other at the feet. They said, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She answered, 'Because they have taken my Lord and I don't know where they have put him.' But then as she said this, she turned around and she saw Jesus. He was standing there, but she did not recognize him. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?' She thought it was the gardener and answered him, 'Lord, if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him and I will go and remove him.' Then Jesus said to her, 'Mary.' (He called her by name.) She turned and said to him, 'Rabboni!' which means master. Jesus said to her, 'I am now ascending to God, my Father who is your Father, to my God who is your God.' So Mary then went and announced to the disciples: 'I have seen the Lord and this is what he said to me.'"

Later on she proclaimed as the apostle to the apostles, this woman who was the first really to recognize Jesus and proclaim the good news. She has seen the Lord. When you look at those two incidents and the two people involved, there's something common between John and Mary Magdalene. They both had great love for Jesus —

deep, profound love. I think that's why each of them could recognize the risen Christ. John is still in the empty tomb, Mary with the deep experience of the presence of Jesus. Why? What's the difference between them and Peter and the other disciples? It's their love for Jesus.

You remember, I'm sure we've heard this before, how in the first letter of John, John describes God: "God is love and where there is love, there is God." There was love between John and Jesus, Mary Magdalene and Jesus; and there is God, the risen Christ. I think that's important for us to reflect on: God is love. John says, "This is the love I mean: God first loved us; we didn't love God." We didn't earn God's love; God loved us. Then Jesus in his life tells us, "My one command: Love one another as I have loved you. Greater love than this no one has, than to give your life for another."

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Love brings the presence of God. If we want to meet the risen Jesus like Mary Magdalene, like John, like the other disciples gradually, then we have to learn to love, to experience love, to love and be loved, to try to have love like Jesus commanded us: "Don't just love those who love you, love even your enemies. Do good to those who hurt you. Return good for evil." Love — that's what we have to experience. That's what we have to bring to one another. That's what we have to fill our life with, is love.

When we begin to do that, even in a small way gradually, day by day, growing in the ability to love and be loved with those closest to us, with those who are enemies to us, with those who are far away from us, when we fill our life with love, then Jesus will be present to us because God is love and where there is love there is God. That's the message of Easter, the message of love, to experience what John did and what Mary Magdalene did, eventually as all of the disciples did: They loved; they experienced Jesus. That will happen to us, too, as we grow in our ability to love one another.

God is love. Where there is love there is God. I really hope and pray that all of us may have a beautiful, joyful Easter as we learn to love one another and come to know the risen Jesus in our own lives.

[Homily given April 1, 2018 at St. Philomena in Detroit, Michigan. The transcripts of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton's homilies are [posted weekly](#) to NCRonline.org. [Sign up here](#) to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.]