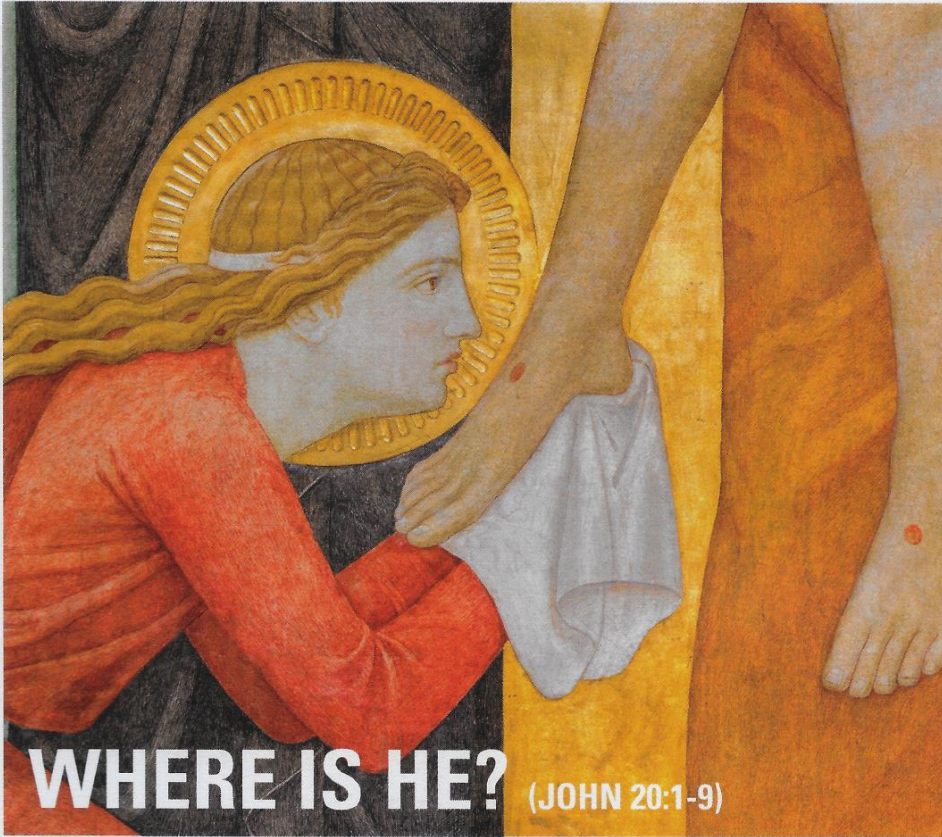


Sunday Message

THE WORD

Year A • Psalter Week 1



Mary Magdalene: detail from *Deposition of the cross scene over St John of the Cross side altar* by P. Verkade (1927) in Carmelite Church in Döbling, Austria

Mary Magdalene is the constant figure in all four accounts of the events of Easter morning.

In John's version, she finds the tomb empty and assumes that someone has moved Jesus' body. Simon Peter and the disciple Jesus loved run to the sepulchre when she reports this: Peter seems equally bewildered, but his companion, thanks to his close relationship to Jesus, sees and believes.

The empty tomb proves nothing: all it can say is "He is not here"; it cannot provide an explanation. The statement that "He is risen" is revealed from God, either by an angelic messenger or by the risen Jesus himself. Peter is given priority in honour as the leader of the disciples by the other one, who waits to allow him to enter the tomb first: but the "Beloved Disciple", the source of the Johannine tradition which is preserved and expressed in the Fourth Gospel, has a certain priority in belief. The links with the raising of Lazarus are clear, as are the differences: whereas Lazarus came out still wrapped in his burial shroud, the cloths which bound Jesus are lying on the ground, with the cloth over his face neatly rolled up.

The Beloved Disciple believes without seeing the risen Jesus. He may well be representing generations yet to come (including ourselves), who will have to believe without visual evidence. But we have the scriptures: it is the scriptures which reveal to us God's plan, that Jesus must rise from the dead. ■

REFLECT

After his resurrection, Jesus addresses the following words to the sceptical disciple, Thomas: "You believe because you can see me. Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe." The resurrection of Jesus is a matter of faith: the empty tomb is a consequence of his being risen, not a proof – Mary Magdalene will later challenge the risen Jesus himself about removing the body.

The resurrection of Jesus is different from the raising of Lazarus: it is more than his being restored to life, and the appearance stories will emphasise that Jesus now lives a glorified life; the empty tomb tells us that it is the same person who was crucified who is now risen.

The Easter event is the core of our Christian faith. When we read the Gospel according to John, we find little, if any, ethical teaching: there is no Sermon on the Mount, and the one beatitude he gives is precisely that of believing without seeing. The essence of the Christian life is believing in Jesus and having a living, personal relationship with him.

At Easter, we are invited to renew our baptismal promises and to profess our faith anew. Hopefully this is the culmination of the joyful season of Lent, in which we have looked at ourselves and how we are trying to live as best we can as disciples of Jesus. May we be truly blessed as those who have not seen and yet believe. ■

LEARN

Mary Magdalene is the constant figure in the tradition of the women's visit to the tomb of Jesus on Easter morning.

St Augustine called her the "apostle of the apostles", as she experiences the risen Jesus and goes to tell the male disciples that he is risen.

In the scene of the race to the tomb, Simon Peter is given priority in honour as the leader of the disciples; the disciple Jesus loved has priority in faith.

SAY

The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

DO

Make the Sign of the Cross with holy water: think of your baptism and what it means to you.