

April 20, 2025

From the Desk of Fr. Jerry

I noticed that the gospel for Easter Sunday morning begins in darkness. Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb "...while it is still dark." At the end of the Easter morning gospel, we are told that the disciples were still in the dark. "They did not understand the scripture that he had to rise from the dead." Characters in John's gospel are usually being invited from whatever level of faith they are at currently to a deeper level of faith. We can guess that at the empty tomb, Mary faced an ambiguity which required the light of a deeper faith.

Admitting that we still do not fully understand the meaning of "had to rise from the dead" is a good way to begin our reflection. Perhaps we can let these three characters tell what they came to see and believe.

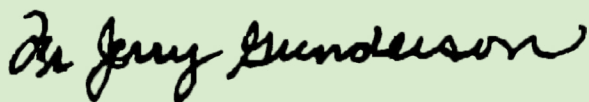
People who get up before sunrise often have something on their mind. They awaken to the feeling that there is something they must do. For Mary Magdalene, the few days before "the first day of the week" had been traumatic. She had witnessed love amid hate, forgiveness amid brutality. Like many people recovering from trauma, her initial shock is yielding to deep sorrow and sadness. While it was still dark, she went to the tomb. What she chose to do is to seek closeness to Jesus at his burial place. Mary was the first to discover the empty tomb.

Simon Peter awoke to his own unfinished business. When Mary came to him with news of the empty tomb he had his own baggage, a feeling of remorse about his triple denial. Although all the disciples abandoned Jesus, Peter alone is singled out. Mary goes first to him. Weighed down with this baggage, Peter races to the tomb, but not alone.

The other disciple was with him. Why such a vague identity? Why was the evangelist not more specific? All we are told is that he ran faster. That's a strange focal point in such an important story. If Peter was loaded with guilt that slowed him down, what was it that increased the pace of the other disciple? Elsewhere in the gospel we learn that this "other disciple" was the one Jesus loved, "the beloved disciple." Today the supposed author of the fourth gospel is the community of the beloved disciple.

What are we to make of these unexpected details of the story? Maybe we are being told that love outpaces fear, anxiety, and guilt in the journey to a deeper faith. We may begin in a darkness of unknowing, but that is not a place we want to stay very long. So we let the scriptures tell the story, "he had to rise from the dead and we ponder its meaning for our lives till this celebration of the paschal mystery deepens our faith and strengthens our love.

Happy Easter!



Fr. Jerry Gunderson