

HOLY SATURDAY 2011

THE COURAGE OF THE RESURRECTION WITNESSES

In the silence that envelops this night, in the silence that envelops Holy Saturday, touched by the limitless love of God, we live awaiting the dawn of the third day, the dawn of the victory of the love of God, the dawn of the light that enables the eyes of the heart to see life, difficulties and suffering in a new way. Our failures, our disillusionments, our bitternesses that seem to signal the collapse of everything, are enlightened by hope. The act of love of the cross, confirmed by the Father and the radiant light of the resurrection, envelops and transforms everything. From betrayal, friendship can be born; from rejection, pardon; from hate, love.

Easter is the promise that death will visit each of us. But more important, it is the assurance that death is not the last word. The Resurrection of Jesus prompts us to recall,

from the darkest moments of grief to life's smallest trials, how much God comforts us and gives us the strength to persevere, The Easter mysteries give us a new identity and a new name: we are saved, redeemed, renewed; we are Christian, and we have no more need for fear or despair.

WOMEN AND EASTER

We still have profound lessons to learn from the women who ran to the tomb that first Easter morning. They represented countless, nameless, yet devoted women who were part of the crowds that Jesus addressed and in the homes he frequented.

They were the courageous ones who reached out fearlessly to touch the fringe of his cloak. They shouted after him; they entered his hosts' houses uninvited, they poured most expensive, perfumed nard over his feet to the consternation of the critics. Some met him at wells at high noon. They waited on him and waited for him, and they

accompanied him from Galilee to Samaria to Jerusalem. They knew the promise made to them, they welcomed him, they knew from Jesus' own treatment of them the strength of their own testimony to him, and they were unafraid to show him great love.

In the end, they stood beneath his dying body, while the men were hiding for fear of the authorities. It was the women who ground spices for his burial and they calculated how to roll back the stone from his tomb. They attended firmly to the business of his living and dying. They were rewarded for their fidelity by being the first recipients of the Good News of the Resurrection.

THE WITNESS OF MARY MAGDALENE

Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany (sister of Martha and Lazarus), and the unnamed penitent woman who anointed Jesus' feet (Luke 7:36-48) are sometimes understood to be the same woman. From this, plus the statement that Jesus had cast seven demons

out of Mary Magdalene (Luke 8:2), has risen the tradition that Mary Magdalene had been a prostitute before she met Jesus. But in reality we know nothing about her sins or weaknesses. They could have been inexplicable physical disease, mental illness, or anything that prevented her from wholeness in mind and body.

Mary Magdalene is mentioned in the Gospels as being among the women of Galilee who followed Jesus and His disciples, ministered to him, and who, according to each of the evangelists, was present at His crucifixion and burial, and went to the tomb on Easter Sunday to anoint His body.

Jesus lived in an androcentric society. Women were property, first of their fathers, then of their husbands; they did not have the right to testify; they could not study the Torah. In this restricting atmosphere, Jesus acted without animosity, accepting women,

honoring them, respecting them, and treasuring their friendship. He journeyed with them, touched and cured them, loved them and allowed them to love him.

In our Easter Sunday Gospel [John 20:1-18], we peer once again into the early morning scene of sadness as Mary Magdalene weeps uncontrollably at the grave of her friend, Jesus. We hear anew their conversation: Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking? Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away. Jesus said to her, Mary! She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, *Rabbouni!* (which means, Teacher) . Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God. Mary Magdalene came, announcing to the disciples, I have seen the Lord, and that He had said these things to her. (John 20:15-18)

Because of her incredible message and mission, Mary Magdalene was fittingly called *Apostola Apostolorum* (Apostle to the Apostles) in the early Church because she was the first to see the Risen Lord, and to announce His Resurrection to the other apostles.

For Jesus, women were equally as able as men to penetrate the great religious truths, live them and announce them to others. There is no secret code about this story, which is still astonishingly good news more than 2,000 years later. Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!