

WHERE'S THE BODY?

(JOHN 20:1-9)

All four Gospel accounts mention Mary Magdalene as visiting the tomb of Jesus on Easter morning.

We might note that, in John's account, she does not report to the two male disciples that Jesus is risen from the dead, only that Jesus' body is missing. Simon Peter does not conclude that the resurrection has taken place after running to the grave of Jesus. The reason for this is that the empty tomb is no proof of anything: it can only tell us that "he is not here"; it cannot supply the reason for this situation. People come to believe that Jesus "is risen", apart from one exception, through an encounter with the risen Jesus or through an angel, a divine messenger, that is, through revelation, not from human deduction or hearsay.

The one exception is the anonymous other disciple, "the one Jesus loved", who does come to believe without any personal meeting with the risen Lord. What enabled him to perceive the true reason behind the scene in front of him was his relationship with Jesus: this individual has been highlighted in the second part of the Gospel, in which the self-giving love of Jesus for his disciples has been stressed and illustrated by his washing of the disciples' feet.

The mention of the linen burial cloths and head covering recalls the Johannine account of the raising of Lazarus, who came out of his tomb still wrapped in his funeral sheets and had to be released from them. The Fourth Evangelist is telling us that Lazarus was restored to the life he had lost: the resurrection of Jesus is of a different order altogether. ■

REFLECT

The male disciples of Jesus are often criticised or ridiculed for not believing the women when these female disciples tell them that Jesus is risen. However, the New Testament tells us that the testimony of the first disciples, on whose testimony belief in the resurrection of Jesus depends, is founded on "a personal experience of the risen Lord". Paul claims to be as much of an apostle as the likes of Peter on this very basis. The empty tomb is no proof, as we see from the Gospel narratives themselves: for example, Mary Magdalene will soon mistake the risen Jesus for the gardener and ask him what he might have done with the body. It is only when Jesus speaks her name that the joyful truth is revealed to her.

Those who enjoy detective stories will appreciate that the empty tomb is not a proof of the resurrection, but is in some ways a consequence of that event. The reason, according to the Christian scriptures, must come from divine revelation, from God: this is supplied either through angels or by the risen Jesus himself.

This means that each of us has to decide for her- or himself whether or not to believe in the resurrection: no one saw Jesus rise from the dead, despite the purely imaginative pictures in many stained-glass windows and illustrated Bibles. ■

SAY

The Lord is truly risen, alleluia!

(from one of the Entrance Antiphons of the Mass on Easter Sunday)

DO

Today is the greatest feast in the Christian year: celebrate it accordingly!

LEARN

No one, including the soldiers on guard in Matthew's account, actually saw Jesus rise from the tomb.

"The disciple Jesus loved" is the figure at the source of the Johannine tradition and therefore of great importance in the Fourth Gospel.

Mary Magdalene is the only constant factor in the stories of the women's visit to the tomb of Jesus.



Mary Magdalene: detail from "Deposition of the Cross" (1927) by P. Verkade, in Carmelite Church, Dobling, Vienna

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

I have risen, and I am with you still, alleluia.
You have laid your hand upon me, alleluia.
Too wonderful for me, this knowledge,
alleluia, alleluia.

GLORIA

Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to people of good will.

We praise you,
we bless you,
we adore you,
we glorify you,
we give you thanks for your great glory,
Lord God, heavenly King,
O God, almighty Father.

Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
you take away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us;
you take away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father,
have mercy on us.

For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High,
Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.

COLLECT

O God, who on this day,
through your Only Begotten Son,
have conquered death
and unlocked for us the path to eternity,
grant, we pray, that we who keep
the solemnity of the Lord's Resurrection
may, through the renewal brought by your
Spirit,
rise up in the light of life.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of
the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

FIRST READING Acts 10:34, 37-43

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles.
Peter addressed Cornelius and his household:
"You must have heard about the recent
happenings in Judaea; about Jesus of
Nazareth and how he began in Galilee, after
John had been preaching baptism. God had
anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with
power, and because God was with him, Jesus
went about doing good and curing all who
had fallen into the power of the devil. Now I,
and those with me, can witness to everything
he did throughout the countryside of Judaea
and in Jerusalem itself: and also to the fact
that they killed him by hanging him on a tree,
yet three days afterwards God raised him to
life and allowed him to be seen, not by the
whole people but only by certain witnesses
God had chosen beforehand. Now we are
those witnesses – we have eaten and drunk
with him after his resurrection from the
dead – and he has ordered us to proclaim
this to his people and to tell them that God
has appointed him to judge everyone, alive
or dead. It is to him that all the prophets
bear this witness: that all who believe in
Jesus will have their sins forgiven through
his name."

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

PSALM

Psalm 117

Response:
This day was made by the Lord;
we rejoice and are glad.
or
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

1. Give thanks to the Lord for he is good,
for his love has no end.
Let the sons of Israel say:
"His love has no end." (R.)
2. The Lord's right hand has triumphed;
his right hand raised me up.
I shall not die, I shall live
and recount his deeds. (R.)
3. The stone which the builders rejected
has become the corner stone.
This is the work of the Lord,
a marvel in our eyes. (R.)

SECOND READING Colossians 3:1-4

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the
Colossians.

Since you have been brought back to true life
with Christ, you must look for the things that
are in heaven, where Christ is, sitting at God's
right hand. Let your thoughts be on heavenly
things, not on the things that are on the earth,
because you have died, and now the life you
have is hidden with Christ in God. But when
Christ is revealed – and he is your life – you
too will be revealed in all your glory with him.

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

Alternative second reading

1 Corinthians 5:6-8

SEQUENCE

Christians, to the Paschal Victim offer
sacrifice and praise.
The sheep are ransomed by the Lamb;
and Christ, the undefiled,
hath sinners to his Father reconciled.
Death with life contended; combat strangely
ended!
Life's own Champion, slain, yet lives to reign.
Tell us, Mary: say what thou didst see upon
the way.
The tomb the Living did enclose;
I saw Christ's glory as he rose!
The angels there attesting;
shroud with grave-clothes resting.
Christ, my hope, has risen: he goes before
you into Galilee.
That Christ is truly risen from the dead we
know.
Victorious king, thy mercy show!

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!
Christ, our passover, has been sacrificed;
let us celebrate the feast then, in the Lord.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL

John 20:1-9

A reading from the holy Gospel according to
John.

It was very early on the first day of the week
and still dark, when Mary of Magdala came
to the tomb. She saw that the stone had
been moved away from the tomb and came
running to Simon Peter and the other disciple,
the one Jesus loved. "They have taken the
Lord out of the tomb" she said "and we don't
know where they have put him."

So Peter set out with the other disciple to go
to the tomb. They ran together, but the other
disciple, running faster than Peter, reached
the tomb first; he bent down and saw the
linen cloths lying on the ground, but did not
go in. Simon Peter who was following now
came up, went right into the tomb, saw the
linen cloths on the ground, and also the cloth
that had been over his head; this was not
with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place
by itself. Then the other disciple who had
reached the tomb first also went in; he saw
and he believed. Till this moment they had
failed to understand the teaching of scripture
that he must rise from the dead.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

RENEWAL OF BAPTISMAL PROMISES

Dear brethren (brothers and sisters), through
the Paschal Mystery we have been buried with
Christ in Baptism, so that we may walk with him
in newness of life. And so, now that our Lenten
observance is concluded, let us renew the
promises of Holy Baptism, by which we once
renounced Satan and his works and promised
to serve God in the holy Catholic Church. And
so I ask you:

Do you renounce Satan?

I do.

And all his works?

I do.

And all his empty show?

I do.

Do you believe in God,
the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth?

I do.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son,
our Lord,
who was born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered death and was buried,
rose again from the dead
and is seated at the right hand of the Father?

I do.

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting?

I do.

And may almighty God, the Father of our Lord
Jesus Christ,
who has given us new birth by water and the
Holy Spirit
and bestowed on us forgiveness of our sins,
keep us by his grace,
in Christ Jesus our Lord,
for eternal life.

Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

Exultant with paschal gladness, O Lord,
We offer the sacrifice by which your Church
is wondrously reborn and nourished.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

Christ our Passover has been sacrificed,
alleluia;
therefore let us keep the feast with the
unleavened bread
of purity and truth, alleluia, alleluia.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Look upon your Church, O God,
with unfailing love and favour,
so that, renewed by the paschal mysteries,
she may come to the glory of the resurrection.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.