

A Reflection for Easter.

Dear brothers and sisters,

Happy Easter! The Lord is Risen! He is Risen indeed!

How are you doing? I hope you are all doing well and keeping safe.

I greeted you with the traditional greeting that Christians of the first centuries used to share with each other at the time of Easter. It was the joyful expression of the Faith that they received from the Apostles. It was the testimony of their belief in the Resurrection of Christ and of their hope in the Eternal Life.

The Mystery of the Resurrection of Christ is the center of our Faith. This is the victory of Jesus Christ over sin and death.

By the mysterious action of the Holy Spirit, the power of Christ's Resurrection is shared with us and we are granted Eternal Life, being asked only to trust the Love of the One Who gave His Life for us.

That greeting represented also another thing: the fulfillment of the Christians' call to be witnesses of the Resurrection of Christ, being "apostles" to each other and to all those who could hear that greeting.

Wouldn't be amazing if we would trust that call also addressed to us today, in this different and strange time of new evangelization in the midst of the Covid-19 emergency?

If we would accept it, we could have the great privilege of being "apostles" ourselves, witnesses of the Risen One.

Only one condition exists for such a wonderful gift and mission: meeting the Risen Christ, so that we may be able to share with others the encounter that we experience ...a living and lived Faith.

In this past Sunday's liturgy, we read the Gospel of John, where Mary Magdalene is described to be the first one to find Jesus' tomb empty and then to meet Him, Risen from the dead.

She the model of the call to be an apostle.

On the first day of the week, after the Sabbath, Mary Magdalene went to Jesus Christ's tomb. In the other three Gospels she is described as going to the tomb with other women to anoint Jesus's body. In the Gospel of John, she is described as being alone. Maybe she just needed to be there, to remember and weep for her sweet Teacher.

According to that Gospel, she was taken by surprise, as she found the stone removed and the tomb empty. Immediately she ran to call Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved and of whom we do not know the name. Then all together went back to the tomb to find out what could have happened.

The Gospel relates that Peter and the other disciple went in the tomb. The Gospel underlines the fact that the "other disciple" saw and believed, noticing the wrapping linens and the cloth that covered Jesus' Face.

The beautiful and interesting part is that Peter and the other disciple left after checking inside the empty tomb. Probably their minds were full of questions and awe for what they saw.

Mary Magdalene didn't leave. She remained there to weep, full of sorrow for the death of her sweet Teacher, and now also for the disappearance of His Body. She appeared to be inconsolable.

Following the story, as soon as Peter and the other disciple left, the Gospel describes two angels sitting inside the tomb, where Jesus' body was lying. The angels asked Mary Magdalene why she was crying, as they were trying to shake her from her sorrow and maybe let her know about the Resurrection. The beautiful part is that she continued to cry, even if the angels were there to console her. She loved Jesus so much that she wouldn't let anybody, not even an angel, distract her.

What an amazing image of our humanity, of beautiful human love, so strong and frail at the same time. Her woman's heart was broken. What would she care about all the Host of angels, when her Loved One was missing, killed in a horrible way and His Body stolen?

Only at that point Jesus appeared to her, and after a first moment when she didn't recognize Him, finally she was able to hear Him calling her name: "Mary!" and to see Him alive, Risen from the dead!

In that moment, surprise, sorrow and joy became the notes of the music that played in her heart, a symphony of emotions that made her soul vibrate with Love for Him, Whom she thought was lost.

In all her frailty, she is the first witness of the Resurrection. Exactly in that moment she became an Apostle, actually an Apostle to the Apostles, as she ran to the others to let them know about the encounter that she had with the Risen Christ.

If we want to accept the call to be witnesses of the Risen Christ, we need to look at her example and learn how to be a witness like her.

How do we do that? How do we become witnesses of the Risen One as Mary Magdalene did?

The first thing to do is to meet Christ, Who is Risen, in person.

Only then we can be apostles; and we meet Him only if we lose ourselves in our love for Him.

Let me share a little bit of my own experience and tell you the story about how I met Christ many years ago.

First of all I need to admit that I was a Catholic, maybe a decent one, but I wasn't looking for Christ. It just wasn't in my mind. I had lots of ideas in there, some good, maybe some bad, and I wanted to realize them in my life.

But then He found me. Christ found me through people that I met and who were in love with Him and who met Him because of their love.

That is the reason why I do believe that we cannot ever underestimate the value of our witnessing, but appreciate how we can be tools of God's Providence for the sake of the Faith of our brothers and sisters.

I remember that I used to go to church on Sunday, confession once in a while (not too often!); I was instructed in the Catechism; I was a good young man (just a little bit of a troublemaker but not that bad) who lived honestly, according to the main Christian moral principles, even though not all of them, not completely...

In short, I was an average Italian young Catholic man of my times... but I never met my Lord.

I had to wait until someone introduced Him to me, through love and not through words.

Don't take me wrong! Definitely words were used; you cannot have a relationship with a person and understand what they have to say without using words. But those words weren't smart, intellectual or moralistic. They were full of passion for Jesus Christ and for His message of Salvation. They were also full of patience, because at that time I wasn't ready to understand all the theology and all the moral demands, as I do today.

Later on I learned that those words were blooming from a heart full of prayer, full of God's Word, full of charity and compassion...

I pray that the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ may bring joy in all our hearts, along with hope that soon we will be set free from the Covid-19 virus.

I pray that we may all pray and reflect on the significance of the Easter celebrations for us Christians.

I also pray that we may fall in love with our Lord Jesus Christ, and discover a great desire in our hearts, a desire to be apostles, witnesses of the Risen One.

May our Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, who wept for her Son dying on the Cross and who rejoiced seeing Him Risen from the dead, look upon us with Mercy and intercede for us. That we may be kept safe from the sickness that is afflicting the world in these days; that a great and passionate love for Jesus Christ may be born within our hearts; and that we may become apostles to our brothers and sisters who have not yet met the Risen Lord.

May the Lord bless you and protect you along with the people you love,

Fr Francesco