

Dear Friends,

The first person to discover that the tomb of Jesus was empty, according to St. John's Gospel, was Mary Magdalene. Later on Easter morning she met the risen Lord himself in the garden of the tomb, but did not recognise him and supposed he was the gardener. When she knows it really is Jesus returned to life he says to her - *Noli me tangere*, 'do not touch me, for I have not yet ascended to my Father.'

It happens several times in the stories of Jesus' resurrection appearances that the disciples do not recognise him, even though he is someone they know well. There is something about him that is different, mysterious. Perhaps they are too caught up in the past, their past knowledge of him, and not open to the possibility that he is alive again when they had seen him die. The idea that a dead person could come back to life was quite beyond their normal way of thinking as people brought up in the Jewish faith. And Jesus was not just alive again, but entered upon a whole new dimension of being.

Some translations of the Scripture interpret the words *noli me tangere* as 'do not hold on to me' or 'do not cling to me,' but the original Greek word is 'touch' and cannot be made to mean 'cling to.' Nevertheless, although this is an interpretation not a translation, it does make sense. When someone we know and love dies, we often want to hold on to the person we knew, even pretend that they are still alive, but we have to let go of them if we are to carry on living ourselves and live in the truth of how things truly are. This may be why commentators suggest that Jesus is saying to his friends, Let go of the Jesus you knew: he has died, do not hold on to him, because if you do you cannot be open to the truth that he has gone beyond death into eternal life, and so cannot know that eternal life for yourselves.

To believe this is a tremendous challenge to the disciples and to us as their successors in the Church. Change is always difficult for us as human beings. We prefer the comfort and reassurance of the familiar, even if it is not very satisfactory. Launching out into a new way of thinking and being which will transform us in a way that is yet unknown can be a fearful prospect. This may be why a writer I admire, John Main, said that it sometimes seems as if we are more afraid of resurrection than we are of dying.

One of my favourite resurrection stories is that of the evening of the first Easter day, when two of the disciples were walking to the small town of Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. One is named as Cleopas, the other is probably his wife, one of the many Marys in these stories. They are downcast and disheartened, all their hopes and dreams of what following Jesus could be have come to nothing with his death. So they go back home: where else could they go? The great adventure is over. And as they walk along Jesus is there with him. They had heard how some of their company had gone to the tomb that morning and found it empty, but this seemed an idle tale, no more than wishful thinking.

As they walk Jesus talks to them and gradually opens their minds to the scarcely credible truth that it is he. They come to the village and since it is late in the day invite him to stay with them and share a meal. It is when he breaks bread for them that they see and know that it really is the risen Lord - and he at once vanishes from their sight. He is present to them now in a new way, no longer confined within his bodily form. Overjoyed they hurry back to Jerusalem, bursting to share the news with the others: it was no idle tale, the Lord is risen indeed! I imagine their outward journey as a slow weary trudge, but on the way back their feet fly over the road.

Easter always this sense of unbelievable, uncontainable joy - and we have a whole season of fifty days to savour it, indeed the whole of our lives here and hereafter.

So on this Easter day of the pandemic I wish you every blessing and all the joy of the risen Lord,

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CHRIST IS RISEN,  
HE IS RISEN INDEED,  
ALLELUIA!