

Homily – April 20th, 2025 – Easter Sunday

As I get older, my appreciation for Mary Magdalene grows as well. She is the first to encounter the Risen Lord. I guess somebody had to be the first;



somebody had to have that honour. It's her struggle with faith and how she stays in the game that really impresses me. She is so genuine. I can relate to her on so many levels. My own faith journey, on a good day, is three

steps forward and two steps back. On a bad day, it two steps forward and three steps back. Mary is the same. She teaches me to live with the ambiguities of life and to trust God is in those moments much more than in the moments where I have convinced myself that I am still in control. Having all the dust settled, dispelling all doubts and insecurity has served my ego very well, but it hasn't made me move forward one centimeter in my faith journey.

We often speak about the death and resurrection of Jesus, as if one experience immediately followed the other. Mary Magdalene reminds me that there's a transition time between dying and rising. There's a reason Jesus had to spend time in the tomb between his death and his resurrection.

This in between time is described as liminal space or liminal time. When you are in liminal space, you are between and betwixt. You've left one job but haven't yet found another one. You're separated or divorced, but you've not found a significant other. Your children have left the house, the thing you always wanted, but now the house feels empty. When you're in liminal space everything is topsy turvy, nothing is settled, nothing is predictable. Liminal space is the hardest place to be. When you're in liminal space you've left one room but have not entered the next room. The temptation is to run back to the old room. Or, have you ever said, "The workload of this coming week is going to be so heavy, I wish I could jump ahead to the future where all of this will be safely in the rearview mirror." When you want to run back or run ahead, you are in liminal space.

Here's the good news of being between and betwixt. While it's a hard place to be, all transformation only happens there, in liminal space. After the death of Jesus, the Apostles go back to the upper room, the room where they celebrated the Last Supper, and lock themselves inside. They've run back to the old room; liminal space is too hard to hack. In another story, because they are lost and grieving the death of Jesus, the Apostles go back to their old way of life. They go back to being fishermen.

Mary Magdalen, on that first Easter morning, is the only one who has the courage to stay in liminal space. She's the first at the tomb. When the disciples come afterwards and discover the empty tomb, they don't stick around. She's on a mission to find the body of Jesus, but there's no body, only

an empty tomb. Is this good or is this bad? There's too much uncertainty, too much ambiguity, too much that doesn't make sense, too much that doesn't fit neatly into Mary's current belief system. Everyone else leaves this space, but Mary doesn't. She remains at the tomb, confused, wondering, questioning, struggling...yet, she remains. It's hard for her to remain in liminal space, without running back to the old room or running forward to the next, but Mary does. She teaches me that the enemy of faith is not doubt but certainty. I don't have to have all the answers right here, right now.

Mary stays at the tomb, stays in the world of liminal space, until it transforms her. A caterpillar must stay long enough in the cocoon until it is transformed into a butterfly. Without that liminal time and space within the cocoon, no transformation occurs. All true transformation only happens in liminal space, where you're not sure, where you don't have all the answers and yet long for them, when everything is up in the air and you have no idea how the future will unfold.

Mary Magdalene's tendency is to hold onto Jesus as she once knew him. She wants to go back to the tried, true, and familiar. She came to anoint a body and she wants Jesus on the old terms. She wants a body. She is clinging to the old. Jesus says, ***"Do not hold on to me."*** He's not scolding her. He's simply telling her that in his resurrected state he's no longer available to her or to anyone else on the old terms, that is, in the form of a physical body. He wants to give her so much more than she is willing to accept. In this world of being between and betwixt, she wants to run back to the past, the good old days.

Jesus, on the other hand, wants to come to her in his new form, his resurrected form. If she cannot let go of his bodily reality, she'll never be able to welcome him in his spirit. Isn't that true of anyone who has died in our lives. The moment a loved one dies, you are immediately thrown into liminal space. You wish you could go back, or you wish you could leapfrog into the future where the loss won't feel so raw. But you can't do either.

Fr. Richard Rohr says, ***“There is a necessary light that is only available through darkness, the darkness that comes from those liminal spaces of birth, death and suffering. You can't learn it in a book. There are certain truths that can be known only if we are sufficiently emptied, sufficiently ready, sufficiently confused or sufficiently destabilize.”***

I think he's absolutely right. You just know something in your battle with cancer that you couldn't possibly know if you never had cancer. You just know something as a recovering alcoholic that would have been impossible to know in your sober past. God uses the thing that would destroy us to transform us. I hate being in liminal space and I wouldn't wish it on anyone else. But life will bring us there usually against our own will. It's a place of submission. Submission is a very powerful theme in world religions. The word “Islam” means submission. Of course today submission has a bad name. However, the person who must always be in control and autonomous will never access healing and the transformative process. If you cannot submit, you cannot die, and if you cannot die, you cannot be reborn.

Thank goodness for Mary Magdalene. She stayed at the empty tomb, that difficult liminal space where all you want to do is run. She stayed until Jesus called her by her name, “Mary.” By having the Lord call her by name, she knew that Jesus was accompanying her in the middle of her confusion, her anxiety, and her fear.

If Jesus will do that for Mary, he’ll do it for us. The empty tomb means that Christ has emptied death of its power. Wait there and Jesus will call you by name as well.

~Fr. Phil