

Homily for Sunday, April 5, 2026 (Easter morning)

All four gospel writers (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) have slightly different versions of the resurrection story as you probably know. They are not contradictory stories *per se* but stories that give us four different angles on the one truth, that Jesus is risen and is still bringing about God's kingdom in our



world.

Today's story, John's version, begins this way: ***Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary***

Magdalene came to the tomb. By

telling us that it's the first day of the

week, John wants us to think about the first day of creation. Whatever is going to happen, it will be an indication that the world is being recreated by God. Mary Magdalene doesn't initially get it, but something big is about to unfold. It is so big, it rivals the creation of the world itself.

But we are told it is still dark. This could mean that something is barely beginning. Or darkness could mean that Mary Magdalene doesn't quite get it. She's still somewhat in the dark. Her consciousness has not been enlightened. The stone has been rolled away from the tomb, and Mary is stressed and can't figure out what it means. She needs to bounce this off other people.

That's the first thing I like about Mary—she not a lone ranger. She's humble. She's not a know-it-all. She runs to Simon Peter and John. The Resurrection of Jesus was no small thing. It was creation starting all over and the beginning of the Church. Only thing is Mary didn't get the enormity of it all. I doubt any of us would have either.

One thing the actions of Mary is telling us is that as Church we need each other. We form the Body of Christ. There are no lone rangers. As Paul reminded the Corinthians, "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you,' nor can the head say to the feet, 'I have no use for you.'" I'm always very leary of people, who rely on the internet to guide them in their faith. Instead of bringing their own life experiences to prayer and trusting in mentors and guides that God has given them, they tend to be loners who become very attached to their opinions. So entrenched in their own thoughts and opinions, you can't even talk or reason with them. The self-righteous Pharisees were a case in point in Jesus' time. They were so "right" even Jesus couldn't make any headway with them.

Mary Magdalene was just the opposite. What a breath of fresh air she is. What a model for what Church should be. Jesus had all the time in the world for her. Mary Magdalene just knew that she didn't know it all. That's the beginning of wisdom; that's what endeared her to Jesus. She knew she needed companions on the journey as we all do. She needed Peter and John in her life just as much as they needed her in their lives.

Unfortunately, Mary's excitement is revealed as distress. She tells Peter and John what she thinks happened. It's interesting that Mary speaks in the plural. She tell Peter and John, **"They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."** When the angels ask her why she is weeping she say, **"They have taken away my Lord, and I don't know where they have laid him."**

Do you ever find yourself speaking in the plural? I do. *"They* jacked up the gas prices, again. *They* increased the price of groceries. *They* don't know what *they* are doing on town council. Why do *they* have to make renewing your driver's license so complicated? Why do *they* make it so difficult for me to get a Church annulment? Why do *they* have to charge so much for a service call? *They* are getting richer while the rest of us are getting poor? They don't understand, do *they*?

"They" are the nameless impersonal forces that are secretly at work undermining and frustrating our best efforts and plans in life. These forces victimize "us".

"They" have killed him and now "they" have taken him away.

In reality, and this is what Mary has to learn and we have to learn, no one takes the Lord anywhere. Jesus has already told us long before his crucifixion and death, "For this reason my father loves me, because I lay down my life, in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have the power to lay it down, and I have the power to take it up again" (Jn. 10:17).

When we feel powerless in this world, like Mary Magdalene did, it's good to remind ourselves that before the Roman soldiers and religious authorities took

Jesus' life, he had already laid it down...long before the hammer and nails came out. And he did it freely. Nobody coerced him into doing it.

The impersonal forces, the world of "they," seems to be dominating and dictating the outer world. But our faith tells us there is a benevolent, compassionate force that loves us so much more that it is willing to lay down its life freely for us.

Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb was distress and discouragement. Not the angels nor the first sight of Jesus could comfort her. However, everything changed for her when Jesus called her by name. All he said was, "**Mary.**" She now moved out of the anonymous world of "they" and into the personal glance of Jesus who knew her by name. It's as if by just saying her name, he was saying, "Everything that is chaotic and stressing you out is going to be OK. I know you, Mary, and all that you are struggling with. I know you like a shepherd who knows his sheep by name."

The shepherd isn't risen simply to go back into heaven and leave us to our own devices. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is still gathering his flock, and still calling each of us by our name. He's still in control of my little world and of the world.

~Fr. Phil