

Easter Sunday
(Acts 10:34,37-43 / John 20:1-9)
05.04.2015

It was very early on the first day of the week and still dark, when Mary of Magdala came to the tomb.

This morning I propose that we consider the person of Mary of Magdala, the first witness to Christ's resurrection, whom we hail, with our Orthodox brothers and sisters, as the *Apostle to the Apostles*,

Mary Magdalene is such a type and pattern for so many of us: so occupied by cares and concerns, so hampered by clung-to grief or self-obsession, we miss the Lord calling to us. Not just calling to us, but calling us by name. Our name.

(Andrew Walker: *Journey into Joy - Stations of the Resurrection.*)

What I propose before we go any further is that we halt for a moment.
Let us set aside our cares and concerns just for an instant.
Let us dare to let go off all our clung-to grief.
Let us forget all our self-obsession.

We are told in another resurrection account how Mary recognised Jesus when He spoke her name.

Let us listen to the voice of the Risen Jesus as He whispers our name into the ear of our heart.

[Moment of silence.]

... In this quiet moment hear your name being pronounced by the Risen Jesus ...

The tender loving tone of the Risen Christ's voice gently whispering our name into the ear of our heart reassures us.

It tells us that He knows us and loves us and accepts us as we are, where we are at in life today.

The Risen Jesus' voice calling us by our name encourages us to dare to believe that we can become more fully the person we really are, the person we long to be, the person the Lord intends us to become.

We become who we truly are to the extent that we consent to and welcome the love the Risen Christ holds in His heart for us.

Christ's love sets us free from all that binds us.

It liberates us from all that holds us back from becoming our truest self.

The Risen Christ desires to see each one of us become *a free man/a free woman under grace*, the beloved child of God we were originally intended to be.

The word the Lord speaks into our hearts today, our name which He pronounces with such tender love, brings us into being anew.

It restores our broken lives.

It heals our wounded hearts.

It recreates us.
It renews our whole person.

Our gathering here on this Easter day should lead us to think not only of the resurrection of Jesus on the first Easter morn.

It should also lead us into an experience of our own resurrection in the here and now of our own lives, as they are, today.

Easter is about our rising to new life, *with* and *in Christ!*

The apostle Paul reminds us that *we are risen with Christ.*
He insists that *we have also passed over into new life in Christ.*

The celebration of Easter should lead us to encounter and believe in the love the Risen Jesus holds in His heart for each one of us in the present reality of our lives.

It should make of us men and women who are more fully alive, whole again.

It should do for us what it first did for Mary of Magdala.

Let me quote for you words of the poet Michelle Roberts from *A Psalm for Easter.*

*On the morning of the third day
Love rose early
Inside the tomb*

*Love breathed in my ear
And lifted me
Love set me upright*

*Then love rolled the stone away
Then love opened my mouth
Then love made me rise*

*And I, who had died in this life
Was born back into it
I, who had died, was risen*

*And she whom I had been searching for was there
She was with me
She was love's body; alive, made whole again*

The *she* who is *love's body, alive, made whole again in the Risen Christ* could be understood as Mary of Magdala and/or the Church and/or each one of us.

Christ's love, which speaks our name into our hearts, makes us alive and whole.
It assures us that we are part of Him, part of His body.
It brings us to new life with Him.

While we long for the new life and the wholeness spoken of here, we are left with the question:
How can we attain this gift?

We wonder: *Where are we called to meet with the Risen Christ? Where is it that we will be led to recognise Him as one alive and life-giving?*

We have the answer to these questions in the resurrection gospels.

Like Mary of Magdala, so often we set out in search of Jesus in places where He is not to be found. We come away from those places disappointed not to have found Him there where we thought we would.

Even when He stops us in our tracks, wanting to reveal himself to us, we are somehow blind to Him.

(We see in the gospel stories how Jesus' disciples failed to recognise Him at first when He appeared to them risen from the dead.)

We read how Mary of Magdala *took Him to be the gardener* when He stood there before her. She was prevented from recognising Him by her cares and concerns, clung-to grief and self-obsession.

As we read further into that particular episode we are shown what brought Mary to recognise the Lord was with her.

It was Jesus' calling her by her name.

When Jesus pronounced her name, as only He could, what He did was to bring Mary back to herself.

There is a way in which we are all brought back to ourself when people address us by our name, using a tone which communicates their longing to see us be with ourself, true to ourself.

I cannot emphasise enough the need we all have to make this fundamental journey, the journey back to ourself, if we are to meet with the Lord.

The Sacred Scriptures and the great Christian tradition insist on this point over and over again.

When we dare to make this fundamental journey, the journey within, what we discover is that the Lord is there inside us waiting for us.

The Risen Lord humbly, patiently, lovingly, waits for each one of us to discover in the depths of our own being that He is already there, longing for us to turn to Him and be awakened to His presence within us.

When the great St Augustine speaks of his long search for the Lord, he explains how he eventually came to discover that all the while he was searching outside of himself, the Lord was waiting for him within himself.

When Mary heard Jesus call her by her name, when she allowed his voice to resonate within her heart, she discovered that the Risen Lord now lived within her.

That same discovery is asked of us.

The apostle Paul does not shy away from reminding us over and over again that the Risen Christ lives within us.

He tells us: *You have come to new life in Christ.*

This is not only the apostle's message to some people long ago.

It is God's word for all of us today.

We have come to new life in Christ!

What a freeing message!

What a liberating word this is!

We are saved, liberated, set free, through our union with the Risen Lord Jesus.

Nothing can bind us any more!

We should stop clinging to anything that could hold us back from experiencing Christ's risen life at work within us, including those false securities we are inclined to hold on to, imagining them to be *of Christ*, when, in fact, they are not.

We are told how Jesus said to Mary when she tried to clasp Him: *Do not cling to me.*

What Jesus said to her there was that she has no need to cling to anything outside herself.

Jesus led Mary to understand that there was nothing to cling to, but Christ within her, calling her by her name.

She was to hold on to nothing, not even Jesus' bodily manifestation which was outside herself.

By pronouncing her name, bringing her back to Himself, the Risen Christ led Mary to realise that He lived within her and that His call to her was a call to become free within herself: free for mission!

Do not hold on to me ... But, go to my brothers and say to them: I am ascending to my Father and your Father, My God and your God.

Out of our listening to the Lord calling us by our name, bringing us back to ourself, made we be led to recognise Christ lives with us and may we come to see that we are sent on mission.

We are sent to transmit the Good News to others today.

As we go out from this place on this Easter day, may we be aware that we carry the Risen Christ within us.

May we be conscious of our mission to manifest to all those we encounter that Christ who is alive in us lives also in them!

Amen!