

Easter Sunday  
(Acts 10:34,37-43 / John 20:1-9)  
20.04.2014

We have a friend who, over coffee with the community one day, spoke of a period when she was Superior in a Religious community of her Order at a time of great change.

She recounted how at one point an older Sister in the community – someone I knew, in fact, and who was quite a formidable lady – came to her, as Reverend Mother, to express what she was feeling in the midst of all the upheavals and changes being brought about by the up-dating of the Order's way of life.

The older nun expressed what she was going through by having recourse to a Scriptural quotation. She made her own the words spoken by Mary of Magdala heard in this morning's gospel passage: *They have taken my Lord away and I don't know where they have put Him.*

It can feel like that to us sometimes.

When things change in our lives – not just in Church life, but in whatever domain – we can find ourselves wondering: Where is the Lord in all this? Has He been taken away?

Let me hasten to add that one does not have to be a senior citizen to feel like this.

In present-day Church life I am quite taken aback really to see how certain younger clerics have reacted and are reacting to the changes in style wrought by Pope Francis.

This leads them to regret the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI.

Dangerously, it leads them to speak in terms of *the real Pope* and the one in place. I have heard that!

What amazes me is how for the young men I refer to everything hangs on style.

They cannot cope because the Pope has discarded some of the non-essential trappings of the Pontifical office.

They forget or fail to recognise that many of the trappings, which were clearly cherished by Pope Benedict, had long been discarded from use in the previous four Pontificates. Pope Benedict had restored them to use. Some of the things that reappeared during his pontificate had not been seen in use since the time of Pius XII.

These examples (that of the old nun and the young clerics I have spoken of) lead me to say something the resurrection of Jesus helps us realise. It is this. To lose the externals of a former way of being or relating is not to lose the essence of being in relationship.

Indeed, frequently it is required of us, if we are to get to what is essential, to begin by setting aside the non-essential layers with which what is truly essential has become covered over.

Let's admit it. There is a tendency in many of us to want to hang on to the past.

We are inclined to be afraid of what is new.

We don't always like change. It makes us feel insecure and uncomfortable.

What is all this about? Where do these fears come from?

The truth, the real issue, is that many of us are afraid of life; we are afraid of living!

When this fear holds us in its grip we are paralysed.

Cardinal Newman's words come to mind at this point: *To live is to change*

What we see again and again in the resurrection narratives is that the disciples' experience of the resurrection led them to enter into an entirely new way of relating to Jesus. They were led to relate to the same Jesus they had known during His earthly ministry in a new way after He had risen from the dead.

The gospels do not hide from us that this was quite a challenge for the disciples.

Even after the resurrection, they still had that innate desire within them, that we witnessed surface at other points in the story along the way: the desire *to put things on hold*, if I can put it that way. Like the disciples, we too can be inhabited by the desire to enshrine a particular moment and/or a specific experience.

There is in all of us a tendency to think as the disciples did on the Mount of the Transfiguration. We would like to settle down, to keep things as they are, not only to savour the moment, but to encapsulate it.

This reaction hinders the flow of life.

We have to learn that we cannot encapsulate life; we cannot hold life still.

*To live is to change!*

Let us look at our own lives in all honesty.

How many of us have dealt a death blow to maturity and freedom in a relationship (including our relationship with the Lord) by desperately trying to encapsulate it in past patterns or the present state of affairs?

We are slow learners, what find it hard to accept, but *letting go* is part of the growing, maturing, process.

If we don't accept to let go we simply cannot grow!

What is it that holds us back from letting go?

Well, quite simply, is it not the fear of loss?

We fear letting go because every letting go implies loss.

We can be frightened of letting go of our securities, letting go of things as we have known them hitherto.

We can also be afraid of letting go of our insecurities, reasoning *better the devil we know!*

We will often make attempts to justify our stagnant, paralysed, frightened attitudes by having recourse to what sound like good and solid arguments of prudence.

We will speak of the importance of staying with the *tried* paths, failing to admit to ourselves and to others that often the real problem is that we are suffering from spiritual dyslexia: these *tried* paths are in fact just *tired* paths! With our spiritual dyslexia leading us to invert the letters of the words we use we cannot always see the difference between *tried* and *tired*!

Quite often our fear (or is it laziness?) means that we cannot bring ourselves to explore uncharted waters. We are afraid or too lazy to enter into uncharted areas of life.

In the name of *tradition* (tradition with a small 't') we cling to what is past and no longer really appropriate.

We take refuge in a bygone era.

Clinging to the past, refusing the present reality, actually becomes sin when we resist letting go of our sacred images for deeper and transcendent experiences.

When our self-limitation becomes crippling, then we are refusing the life God offers us.

In so doing, we harm ourselves and we deprive others of what we are called to give them; and that is our *life!*

The resurrection gospel narratives show us that Jesus wanted to lead His disciples to transcend the old relationship they had with Him, with its limitations. He wanted them to discover Him in another way than before His rising from the dead and to find a new way of relating to Him.

Jesus wanted His disciples to discover Him as the risen Christ, now totally free. He wants *us* to discover new life in freedom within ourselves!

*They have taken my Lord away and I do not know where they have put Him*, the old nun lamented, echoing Mary's words.

We too are led to think along these same lines at times.

When we feel tempted to think like this, rather than lament our losses, let us dare to rejoice to be led into the new thing the Lord is doing.

What we are being led to discover is that Jesus is not there where we thought He was ... and that might mean accepting that He is not there where we were taught He was.

Risen from the dead the Lord is no longer in one place alone.

Now He is everywhere.

The Risen Lord is all around us.

He is within us.

He is in each person we encounter.

He is in every situation we will ever know, including those from which He appears to our eyes to be absent.

Let me leave the last word to the late Thomas Merton.

Merton shares with us an insight that we would all do well to pay heed to and apply to our own lives.

I quote from his well-known work *No Man Is An Island*:

*Only when we are able to 'let go' of everything within us, all desire to see, to know, to taste and experience the presence of God, do we truly become able to experience that presence with an overwhelming conviction and reality that revolutionalise our entire inner life.*

What Merton says there amounts to this: If we don't let go of our preconceived ideas of where Jesus is and how things ought to be, we hinder ourselves from experiencing Christ's risen life where we need to experience it most ... and that is within us!

Christ has been put within us!

He lives in our hearts!

For that reason we can rejoice and sing *our* – or rather allow Him to sing within us *His* – Easter *Alleluia!* Amen!