



### **Homily for Easter Day:**

### **John 20:1-18**

I woke so early the morning after the long-drawn out hours of the Sabbath well before dawn displayed any glimmer of light. I was surprised to find I had slept at all as for most of those seemingly endless night hours I had lain awake as I had done the previous night tossing and turning reliving all the horrors of that Friday when I watched with the other women the horrific death of the man who had changed my life around. The man Jesus who had shown such love to me and to countless others who needed care, needed healing and comforting, needed feeding, need forgiveness and above all needed hope that unlikely as it might seem he was the promised Messiah whom Isaiah had foretold. The promised Messiah of our long held dreams who would be our Saviour, our King.

That Friday there was no such hope and all our dreams seemed to have been completely pointless as we witnessed the life force of that stricken, agonised figure pinned to a cross slowly ebb away. Never could I have imagined such a cruel tortured death inflicted by seemingly callous soldiers and jeered, taunted and even spat at by so many in the crowd. We women apart and speechless for what words could we say? We stood apart as we heard those words of forgiveness 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.' How could he forgive such the deliberate infliction of such pain, such venomous hate when all he had ever shown was love. We stood apart and we wept for the man we loved.

For two long nights and the Sabbath day between them those blood- spattered images of a form of death I could never have conceived of swirled relentlessly through my mind and I heard again and again the tormented cries of agony of all those helpless victims of so called Roman justice. Heard the obscene jeers and taunts of the crowd and the dreadful heart rending hiccoughy sobs of the women with me. Saw again and again Jesus' pain etched face, the grotesquely mocking faces of the crowds and the tormented, twisted tear-stricken face of his

mother. And over and over again these horrific repeated images thrust themselves into my mind of those three bloodied bodies grotesquely writhing against the pull of the nails and their almost subhuman screams the like of which I never wish to hear again. I tried to pray but what words could one say. How could I say, 'Father forgive them'? No such words were an impossibility for me. That Sabbath day I felt myself in some form of prison tortured in spirit as he was by those images.

And then at last to that pre- dawn awakening and my release from the restraining bonds of the Sabbath. I dressed quickly and picking my way carefully in the dark made my way to the tomb that good man Joseph of Arimathea had made available for my Lord's broken body. What was in my mind I'm not really sure as I knew a great stone had been rolled across its entrance by order of the authorities. A stone far far too heavy for me to move but at least by going I could feel somehow close to him. As I approached the place the first pale rays of dawn made it possible for me to see and my insides seemed to drop into some unimaginable void within me as I saw that the stone had been pushed aside and the tomb was empty. Empty how could that be? Who could have taken that body? For what seemed an eternity I stood in a state of bewildering shock, of complete blankness of thought and feeling even before turning to run to find Simon Peter and John and blurt out the enormity of what I had discovered. The tomb was empty, the body gone and who knew who had done this and where the body was now. What further desecration had taken place?

The two men on hearing my stuttered words raced off to the tomb leaving me to follow more slowly, my mind a maelstrom of fears. When I reached the tomb again, I could not bring myself to enter that dark sepulchral space but stood weeping as I had never wept before even on that Friday the coursing tears emptying me yet again of all rational feeling. But then as my sobs turned to something less wild and uninhibited I did stoop to look into that dark place and saw to my utter astonishment what I now know must have been angels. Angels who asked me why I was weeping. Why I was weeping? What a question? Did they not know what had happened? Were they so unaware that they were in the place of my Lord's body? The body I knew I just needed to see; just had to see.

I turned numbly back from the tomb entrance, and it was then I saw a figure standing behind me in the shadows. A figure I reasoned must surely be the gardener for who else could it be, up and about at such an hour in such a place? Surely, he must know where Jesus's body was. And then he spoke very gently, very softly asking me why I was weeping and who it was I was

looking for. And to this seeming stranger's questioning I hesitatingly asked him if he was the one who had taken the body and where he had laid him. And then, oh then it was like some miracle, well it was miracle as I heard that unmistakable voice that I had heard so many many times speak my name 'Mary! The sound of his voice filled me with an indescribable joy. It **was** Him! It **was** my Lord! It **was** my Rabbouni, my teacher. It **was** my Messiah, our Messiah! I went to touch him, to hold him but he forbade me saying strange words I did not understand at the time about ascending to his Father and telling me instead to go and tell all his disciples what I had seen, what I Mary Magdalene had witnessed. And I knew now that this was to be my mission for the rest of my life and nothing, but nothing, could or would ever stop me as I knew my Rabbouni, my Messiah, my Lord would for evermore be there by my side to show me the way.

That was the day that all our hopes revived; all our longings for a true Messiah realised. This **was** the Messiah who was indeed God's Son, This, **was** the Messiah who had conquered death to prove the enormity of God's love for his children. This **was** the Messiah whose promise had been realised; 'I will **not** leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you **will** see me, because I live, you also will live.' This **was** the Messiah who that morning after the Sabbath brought what I had felt a new indescribable joy into this world; the joy of love unknown, the Saviour's love for us His children.

May each of you as you like me relive the events that led to that first Easter Day be filled with the same overwhelming sense of wonder, the same ecstatic joy, the same embracing sense of immortal love that I felt and lift your voices to heaven in heartfelt praise to Jesus Christ who has truly risen today.