

EASTER DAY
Acts 10:34a; 37-43
Col 3:1-4
Jn 20:1-9

On Good Friday we experienced the gruesome but salvific event of three trees standing alongside each other outside Jerusalem. That scene has changed to a nearby garden, a place of life and growth. God's story of salvation is a story of three important gardens.

In one garden Adam was self-focussed. In another, Jesus was God-focussed. In one, God sought Adam, in another Jesus sought God. In one Adam hid from God. In another Jesus was raised from the darkness of the tomb. In one, Satan took Adam to a tree that eventually led to his death. Jesus embraced a tree that led to his and our new life. The gardens are Eden, Gethsemane and the garden of Resurrection.

The garden of Eden was a garden of deception and decision. Satan is described as being subtle, that is deceptive. He deceived Even into eating the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but Adam chose to disobey God by accepting the fruit from Eve. Both were driven from the garden and to their ultimate death. Humans possess free will. We can choose to ignore God, be indifferent to him, disobey him or be fully open to him. We choose to be self-focussed or God-focussed. Self-focussed choices are made because we think we know best. This is pride and as with Adam, pride comes before the Fall.

In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed that the cup of suffering might be taken away from him, but like his Blessed Mother and St Joseph, he was open to God's will. "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done" (Lk 22:42). Gethsemane is the garden where Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss of friendship, but it was also the place that Jesus listened to God, and despite the cost, chose to obey him. Through this obedience the disobedience of Adam was neutralised.

"In the place where Jesus was crucified there was a garden" (Jn 19:41). On Easter morning Mary Magdalen stood weeping outside the empty tomb where Jesus had been laid. She turned and saw Jesus and assumed he was a gardener. In the garden of Eden, God looks for Adam and Eve and asks them questions. In the garden of the Resurrection Jesus asks Mary Magdalen who *she* is looking for. He knows the answer, but Mary needs to recognise him and when he speaks to her, she does. This is the critical moment in her life as it is in ours. Mary tries to hold on to Jesus, but he refuses. She must let go of the old relationship she had with him in order to embrace the new. This new relationship is achieved through the power of love which is stronger than death and decay. The risen Christ is known from a new perspective.

Before knowing Jesus, Mary Magdalen's life was troubled and chaotic. Jesus brought order into her life and without him after Good Friday she was lost. Her moment of recognition in the garden led her to a new level of relationship with Jesus so she obeyed his command and ran and told the others what Jesus had told her. She became a new creation with an ongoing spiritual relationship with her saviour.

We are celebrating the Resurrection in the chaos of a crisis which is challenging our comfort zones to a degree none of us in the West have experienced for many years. It is said that life will not be the same after this pandemic is over. Time will tell whether this turns out to be true. What is certainly true is that the world has not been the same since the events in the garden of the Resurrection which we are celebrating today. Jesus did not somehow survive his crucifixion. Neither was he revived like Lazarus because revival assumes that there is nothing better than what we have already seen. Resurrection is renewal. It is 'dying' to what was and experiencing the power of God to draw what was old into what is new.

This was Mary Magdalen's experience. It is the experience of all faithful disciples. It must be the experience of the Church as we look beyond the present and it must be our personal experience. The Church may have fewer members in the future, but those remain faithful and are people of the resurrection, will be stronger.

I wish you all a very happy and blessed Easter.

Msgr Harry Entwistle
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