

**Homily for Easter Sunday 2023**  
**By Fr. Jerome Ituah, OCD**  
**Readings: Acts 10:34, 37-43; Ps 117(118); Col 3:1-4; Jn 20:1-9**  
**Theme: The Lord is Risen!**

The resurrection event formed the core of the preaching of the disciples of Jesus. It was at the very centre of their catechesis. In the first reading, Peter says, ‘This man God raised on the third day and granted that he be visible, not to all the people, but to us, the witnesses chosen by God in advance.’ The resurrection was not a hidden event for the disciples and the early church. It was an experience that made an indelible mark on their lives to the point that they were ready to talk about it and die for it as the truth.

Interestingly it is also at the heart of Paul’s preaching. In the second reading, the letter to the Colossians, St. Paul summarises why we must believe in the resurrection. God has given us true life in Christ. Therefore, we must look at the things of heaven, where Christ is now seated at the right hand of God. What should be our attitude? We must fix our thoughts on heavenly things, no longer on the things of this world. We must look forward to the things of heaven, our true home so that when we die, we can share that life with Christ. That desire to look for the Lord drove Mary of Magdala to the tomb.

The gospel reading from John’s resurrection narrative today has some interesting points. First, the first day of the week reminds us of the previous day, the seventh day, the Sabbath. The women could not go to the tomb on the Sabbath day not to defy themselves or break the Law. The punishment for breaking the Sabbath was death (cf. Exo 31:15-16). They went on the first day of the week intending to anoint the body of Jesus. This first day of the week, which by the account of Genesis was the beginning of creation, will be the new day of worship for the early Christians, which we now call Sunday. Jesus’ resurrection initiates a new creation. Second, the women went to the tomb while it was still dark. John highlights that only Mary of Magdala went to the tomb. In Matthew, two women are mentioned, Mark has three women, and Luke has three women and the other women. What is common to all the narratives is that Mary Magdalene is mentioned in all the stories (cf. Matt 28; Mk 16; Lk 24). Mary Magdalene represents the other women in John’s gospel. These women were passionate about the Lord and could not wait for daylight before going to the tomb. Mary of Magdala went to report to Peter and the beloved disciple for two reasons. For the testimony to be accepted, there must be two witnesses (cf. Deut 19:15), and she recognised the authority of Peter and the apostles given to them by Jesus.

Peter and the other disciple ran together, but the younger disciple definitely ran faster and reached the tomb before Peter. Again, we see the recognition of the authority of Peter. The other disciple waited for Peter to arrive and enter the tomb before doing so. Third, they saw the linen cloths on the ground and the cloth used to wrap the head neatly folded and rolled away. It was not a case of someone hurriedly leaving. Instead, it witnesses to clothes carefully arranged by a person. The presence of the clothes symbolises that Jesus had risen and was not stolen or run away with the clothes to cover himself. But most significantly, when we die, our bodies may decay, and the clothes we are buried in remain on the earth. Still, our resurrected bodies will not stay in the grave. It returns to God. The body of Jesus returns to heaven, leaving behind everything earthly in the grave. Finally, they believed that his body was not there. However, they still had not understood the full meaning of resurrection as Jesus had taught them and as contained in Scripture (cf. Ps 16:10; Isa 53:10).

Today, we must be joyful because Jesus’ resurrection has given us hope that our bodies may rot in the grave. Still, our souls will surely return to God and reunite with Jesus and the saints in heaven. We are truly Easter people, and alleluia is our song. Happy Easter and God’s blessings!