

Sunday Homily

EASTER DAY

17 APRIL 2022

YEAR C

“Supposing him to be the gardener...”

John 20:15

Illustration

It was an easy mistake to make. Garden, gardener. Early morning, before the fierce sun made manual work impossible, was the time to be tidying up, sweeping the paths. Who else would be there at that hour, among the dead?

Gospel Teaching

She was there to get away, as much as anything. So much had happened, so fast. The supper, the arrest, the hasty trial, the rush to execution, so much fear and grief in such a short time. And then the confusion of finding the tomb empty, and Peter and John no use, having a look, going away again, no efforts to find him.

She knew he wasn't there, but still she stayed. It was quiet, and empty. After all the noise, the rush, the emotion, now there was nothing, nothing but the still air, the dark space in the cave, and, away in a corner, the gardener doing whatever gardeners do.

He had rescued her. She had been ill, despised, an outcast, a woman with no friends, stared and pointed at in the street, living on the edge. He had drawn her into his circle of friends, his new community, where people who were nothing gained infinite worth. Under his gaze she had blossomed. She had learned of the new world where God reigned, where all the rules and regulations that had so oppressed her were overturned, where the poor were rich and the humble exalted, where the sick found healing and the tormented found peace, where even death could be challenged. But then they had come for him, as the powerful do for those who stand up to them. And now he had gone, leaving behind this empty space, this nothingness.

There was no going back. He had loved her, and, once you have been loved, the world is different for ever. She had a job to do, she knew. There was his mother to console. There were his friends to support while they decided what to do now. And then there was a future to find, a way of hanging on to it all. The new world of God's reign was too precious to lose.

The gardener was nearer now, disturbing her peace. Suddenly she was angry, that someone had taken the body away, denying her a last look, a quiet goodbye.

Roman soldiers perhaps? The religious authorities? Misguided disciples? The gardener might know.

But then there was the voice. "Mary," he said. The voice that had called her home into his family, calling her again. Even through her tears, she knew him. Not the gardener, then. She should have known, of course. How could she have believed for one moment that death could defeat him? Had he not shown them that love was stronger than death? How could she not have seen? How could she not have felt, in the quiet, in the emptiness, creation holding its breath waiting for his reappearing?

It was an easy mistake to make. Garden, gardener. A stupid mistake, perhaps. Or perhaps not. Because the garden was changed now. No longer the patch of scrubland carved from the dusty city. Now there was a new creation, and the garden was that garden from long ago, when the new human beings enjoyed the fresh dawn of the world where fruit fell from the trees and God walked in the evening cool. In the cool of this dawn God walked again, the world's gardener, coaxing from the dust of death the growth of fresh new life.

Like Eve, she had to leave Eden. She would have loved to stay, enjoying his company all to herself. But there was a whole world out there that didn't know that Eden had returned. Most would not believe her, but some would. They would take the message of the new creation until the seeds of Eden were planted all around the world.

Application

Mary's story helps us to see the resurrection of Jesus through one person's eyes, someone to whom Jesus had been immensely significant, who grieved his loss desperately, and who had the courage to believe the resurrection message and act on it, taking the news of death's defeat to the traumatised and sceptical disciples. Through Mary we too receive the news. Death no longer has the last word. The seeds of Eden are here too. There is new life, eternal life, for those who are willing to take it. Love has proved stronger than hate, life stronger than death. Today the gate of Eden is open, and all may go in.