

## **THE JOY OF SEEING THE RISEN LORD**

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*Reading: John 20:19-21*

Easter should be a joyful time—even more joyful than Christmas. At Christmas time we remember the birth of the Lord in Bethlehem, how He came on earth. But while this was certainly keeping a great promise, it was only the beginning of the Lord's work on earth. At Easter time, we celebrate the triumphant, victorious ending or completion of His work on earth.

We remember that the Lord rose in glory on the third day after He had been cruelly crucified. It is this Risen Lord that we should worship and obey—the risen, glorified Lord whom the disciples saw on the day He rose from the dead.

The disciples had not understood what the Lord had told them about what was to happen. He had told them several times that He would be betrayed, would be crucified, and would rise again on the third day. But it was as if the disciples had not heard Him. They did not wish this to happen, so they refused to face the possibility that it would. The human mind has a great ability to ignore what it does not want to face. So, even when the women told the disciples that the Lord's body was no longer in the sepulcher, they still did not even begin to think of what the Lord had said about rising on the third day. It was all a big puzzle to them.

They now knew that the sepulcher was empty, and that Mary Magdalene had actually seen the Lord and had spoken to Him. Two men, having returned from Emmaus, had just explained that they had had a conversation with the Lord. Yet the disciples still did not know what to believe. They could not understand why the Lord had not resisted the leaders of the Jewish Church and escaped from them. They thought of Him, not as their God, but as a great Prophet, or a great military and political leader like Joshua or David. They had been completely desolated by His death, and now were only confused by these reports that He was alive and had been seen. They did not know what to think.

So, on the evening of that great day, they were huddled together in one room, behind locked doors in case the Scribes and Pharisees, the leaders of the Jewish Church, might come and arrest them and treat them the way they had treated their Lord and Master. There was an atmosphere of fear and gloom in the room. They were also mystified, as they discussed somberly the events of the day. You can picture their puzzled frowns; the quiet conversation trailing off into silence; some of the disciples shaking their heads slowly, as we do when we don't know what to make of something....

AND SUDDENLY, THERE WAS THE LORD STANDING IN THEIR MIDST!

One moment He was not there; the next He was. In spite of the locked doors, He was right there in front of them. They were not only astonished and shocked but also trembling with sudden fear. They thought they saw a ghost. The Lord could see fear and terror written all over their faces, so He immediately calmed them down by saying, "Peace be with you!" (John 20:19). Then He showed them His hands and His side with the wounds from His crucifixion—and they knew Him. They could see it was the Lord. They knew what to believe now!

And then there follows what must surely be the greatest understatement in the Word: "Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord" (John 20:20). That is what our translation says, but in the original language it says: "Then the disciples *rejoiced* when they saw the Lord." They rejoiced! Their hearts must almost have burst with joy! It was the Lord! He was alive after all! He had indeed risen from the dead. All that He had said was true.

Then the Lord said to them once again, "Peace to you" (John 20:21). He next told them that He was sending them out into the world to tell people about heaven and how to prepare for heaven, just as He had been doing. They were to go forth and tell everyone about the Risen Lord. The leaders of the Jewish Church thought they had gotten rid of Him. But He had won. And the disciples were to go forth with joy to tell the world about it.

That is why Easter is such a joyful time. It is a time when we remember the victory of the Risen Lord. Like the disciples of old, we rejoice when we see the Lord as He really is.

Amen.