

Reflection for Wednesday May 6th

John 20:2-8

² So Mary ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.' ³ Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. ⁴ The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷ and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed.

Reflection

Luke's Gospel tells us that, after hearing from the women, Peter visited Jesus' tomb. However, John's Gospel gives us much more detail about this story, also telling us that Peter was not alone but was accompanied by the *beloved disciple*.

Peter and this unnamed disciple run towards Jesus' tomb. When John tells us that the beloved disciple runs faster than Peter, it is a statement about theology, not about physical prowess. The beloved disciple runs faster, not because he has been training or because he has fancier running shoes, he runs faster because his love is stronger. It is this love that enables him to immediately understand and believe in what he sees inside the tomb, whereas Peter takes a bit longer to get there; physically and spiritually.

I wonder what it is that gets in the way of Peter's love and that slows him down? Perhaps it is his memory of having denied Jesus three times just before his death? I know there are times when my feet drag as I go towards the Lord, not because I don't love him but because I allow all my own failings to weigh me down, and because I can't believe that his love for me can remain unchanged no matter what.

When Peter does arrive, he goes straight into the tomb, followed by the beloved disciple. John tells us about the difference between what can be seen from outside the tomb and from inside the tomb. This is important because it is what can be seen from the inside that enables the beloved disciple to move from just seeing, to believing.

Well what did the different view reveal? From the outside, looking in from a distance, it is possible to see the linen cloths in which Jesus' body had been wrapped. But from right inside the tomb, not only can they see the

linen cloths but also the *soudarion*, the veil that had been over Jesus' face, not with the other cloths but rolled up neatly on its own.

When John tells us this detail we are meant to remember the raising of Lazarus. Jesus calls to Lazarus and he comes out of the tomb still bound and with his face covered, and Jesus says, *unbind him and let him go!* Unlike Lazarus, who was totally passive in being raised from the dead, the neatly rolled *soudarion* tells us that Jesus has been active in his raising. He had told his followers that through his Father he had received power to lay down his life and power to take it up again, and now they can see that this has happened. Jesus has reclaimed life and the neat grave clothes proclaim that he has been in total control of the situation, tidying death away as he left it behind.

What I think this story has to say to us is that sometimes the evidence of God's purpose is right in front of us but, like Peter, we might not immediately recognise it when we see it. Sometimes we come to places and situations where all we can see is the end; the loss of hopes, our own failings, the absence of someone or something precious, death. We see the evidence of the ending, but we may fail to grasp the signs of the new beginning.

In situations of pain, many of us prefer to stay on the outside. It can be so hard to bear loss and grief that any distance can be a welcome relief from its anguish. However, it is right inside the place of grief, inside the tomb, that the evidence of God's purpose is found. If we are prepared to enter that darkest of places, we will find that God is in control, the grave clothes are folded, death is defeated, he is risen.

And what helps us to enter right inside places of pain, darkness and death and to recognise what we see there? It is love. The love that overcomes death and gives us abundant life. God's love, alive and growing in our hearts.

I believe this is the call of the church, to learn to love so that we risk entering into the darkness of life, trusting that God is active there, praying for eyes that are able to see God's purpose and seeing, to believe.

The Lord be with you.