

John 20: 1-9

1 On the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early in the morning, when it was still dark. She realizes that the stone, which blocked the entrance to the tomb, has been removed. 2 She starts running and goes to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, to tell them: one has taken the Lord from the tomb and one does not know where one put him. 3. Peter and the other disciple therefore went out to go to the tomb. 4. They were both running together. But the other disciple ran ahead faster than Peter and was the first to reach the tomb. 5 Leaning over to look inside, he sees the linen wrappings lying on the ground, but however he does not enter. 6 Finally comes Simon Peter who followed him, and he enters the tomb. He sees the linen wrappings lying on the ground, 7 as well as the shroud which covered his head; the latter was not, however, with the linen wrappings lying on the ground, but rather rolled up apart in a particular place. 8 It was then that the other disciple entered, the one who had arrived first at the tomb: he saw all these things and began to believe.

Gospel commentary - Homily

The disciple whom Jesus loves

In the bereavement period, we usually remember the key events of the deceased that reaches its high point with the funeral, and it is only after the burial or cremation that comes the time of internalization. Do you not find something similar in the story of the empty tomb on this Easter Sunday? Of course, the visitation time has been shortened: the time to extract the body from the cross and wrap it in linen. Quite quickly, we are thrown into the after funeral, when there is no more body, in this stage of internalization.

Allow me to open a parenthesis here: what would have happened if the body of Jesus had always been there, in the tomb, and that we could have spent time with this body surrounded by linen? Don't tell me: this scenario was impossible, because Jesus is risen! One could affirm the resurrection of Jesus while seeing his body lying in the tomb: the state of resurrection does not need this mortal body. Besides, there is a consensus in the biblical milieu to affirm that the tradition of the resurrection and that of the empty tomb are completely independent. Read Paul's epistles and you will not see any mention of the empty tomb; and when he speaks of the risen body, he speaks of a "spiritual" body, different from the carnal body (1 Cor 15:44). So I come back to my question. In fact, if the body had always been there and, admitting that it would not be decomposed, I think that we would have developed a form of castrating attachment to the past: we would have been a religion of memory.

So here we are faced with the absence of a body. With this absent body we can put so many things in our own life: the absence of so many things that could make my life exciting and thrilling, the absence of loved ones that I would like to keep with me, the absence of this sacred security that we all seek, the absence of a young and alert body that I used to have. We could add these unfulfilled desires to understand a personal story, to give meaning to all these happenances and accidents of a lifetime, to explain a living environment that can appear insignificant and without bearing on others. Mary Magdalene cries, "I need this body, tell me where I can find it?"

Let's look at Peter's behaviour and the other disciple. Peter enters the empty tomb. He appears to be the first to open up to this experience of absence. One finds with him all those for whom this experience only generates a series of painful questions and incessant interrogations. The disciple whom Jesus loved enters in turn. Unlike Peter, at the heart of this experience of absence, he sees and he believes. Here he is first in the experience of faith. What did he see? What did he believe?

The evangelist takes care to note that the shroud which covered his face was not with the linen wrappings, but rolled up apart in one place. Clearly, the absence of the body is not due to a kidnapping as Mary Magdalene thought, because one would not have taken the time to remove the shroud and roll it carefully in another place. But these clues, Peter saw them too. What did he see more than Peter? How could the shroud have become a sign?

Friend reader, the biblical scholar that I am here is somewhat confused. I refuse to fall into the trap of fundamentalists for whom there is no chance, for whom God governs the smallest event. However, I am convinced that it was the feeling of having been deeply loved that enabled the other disciple to be the first to sense the signs that the situation was not an accident, to search feverishly for a meaning, to remember the words of Jesus and make a connection with all of Scriptures. What he discovers? A meaning which emerges from all this mourning and which makes a presence felt, and this feeling leads him to say: "I am no longer the disciple that Jesus LOVED (past), but I am now the one Jesus LOVES (present)". Him whom love made run faster than Peter, sees this relationship becoming an eternal present.

Among the Easter narratives, this is the one that appeals to me the most. Like many of you, I have never had privileged experiences of the living Jesus, as the stories of encounter with the risen Jesus seem to suggest to some. But the evangelist John presents to me here the experience of faith par excellence, and it is done without seeing Jesus. He invites me to open up to all that constitutes the emptiness of my life, the absences that hurt, the somewhat forced farewell, and he tells me, "Look a little better, in the heart of what seems to be a void, there is a loving presence waiting for you? And at that moment, you will experience a peace that will bring forth these words: he is here, very alive!"

At the time of this writing, the newspapers tell the story of these young Inuit people who use gasoline vapor. They are said to have never experienced parents who see them, pay attention to them, love them. Their destitution has become a bottomless void. With this disciple who discovered very early what it is to be deeply loved, I formulate this prayer: that finally comes Easter for everyone, so that life could germinate of our mournings.