

EASTER

SUNDAY

YEAR A



FIRST READING

Acts 10:34, 37–43

PSALM

Psalms 118:1–2, 16–17, 22–23

SECOND READING

Colossians 3:1–4

GOSPEL

John 20:1–9

### Prayer

*Psalms 118:1–2, 16–17, 22–23*

O give thanks to the LORD,  
for he is good; his steadfast  
love endures forever!

Let Israel say, “His steadfast  
love endures forever.”

The right hand of the  
LORD is exalted; the right  
hand of the LORD does  
valiantly.”

I shall not die, but I shall  
live, and recount the deeds  
of the LORD.

The stone that the builders  
rejected has become the  
chief cornerstone.

This is the LORD’s doing; it  
is marvelous in our eyes.

### Reading the Word

*First Reading:*

*Acts 10:34, 37–43*

Then Peter began to speak to them: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in

Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

*Second Reading:*

*Colossians 3:1–4*

So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

*Gospel: John 20:1–9*

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to

the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she 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.”

Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

*Scripture quotations from  
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## Hearing the Word

### *"The Greatest Gift"*

Following on from the proclamation of the Resurrection at the exuberant and elaborate Easter Vigil, which begins the Easter Season, the Easter Sunday readings lead the faithful into this important time for Christian faith and life. This season celebrates Jesus' resurrection as the turning point of salvation history, and explores its significance for Jesus' followers and believers. Since the resurrection of Jesus is the supreme act of God for the sake of believers and his creation, the first Sunday of this new season fittingly celebrates this victory over death as God's greatest gift.

The first words that resound in the liturgy of Easter morning come from Peter who declares with absolute conviction that "God shows no partiality". In the course of his years with Jesus and then, having seen the empty tomb and subsequently having encountered the risen Jesus, Peter finally and fully understood that Jesus' mission was about bringing God's gift of eternal life to all humanity. Referring to God's impartiality, Peter emphasizes that this is a universal gift. No human-made distinctions or religious divisions, no ethnic groupings or cultural categories place restrictions on God's gift, they apply no longer. In Jesus Christ God has done something entirely new and wholly universal.

Peter proceeds by presenting the justification for this extraordinary claim. He begins with a brief and general outline of the life of Jesus in its essential ele-

ments: Jesus' baptism and the gift of God's Spirit, Jesus' ministry of healing and exorcism and, finally, Jesus' death. But, unlike any death ever before, Jesus' death was not the end of the story. Rather, because of God's love and power at work in Jesus, his death, instead of being the end, became the beginning, as Peter attests that God raised Jesus on the third day. The apostle himself experienced the risen Jesus and shared a meal with him and with other chosen witnesses, who then went on to proclaim the risen Lord to the world. This speech of Peter contains the essential elements of the Christian "kerygma", that is the proclamation of the core of the Christian faith, which lies in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Peter concluded his speech by linking these events with the Old Testament. The prophets in the past, without realising it, anticipated Jesus' resurrection by expressing hopes for the final redemption of God's people. Their words reflected both human longing and God's plans for humanity. All these have now been fulfilled as Jesus rose from the tomb.

Like Peter, Paul considers the resurrection of Jesus the absolute core and foundation of his faith, life and mission. For him, the resurrection is an indispensable and essential element of Christianity (cf. 1 Cor 15:3-5) without which this faith and its practice would be pointless and absurd (cf. 1 Cor 15:13-18). The letter to the Colossians written by Paul, or one of his disciples, draws out the implications of the resurrection for

the life of a Christian in this present world. The authors states that Christian baptism leads those who receive it to be so intimately linked to Christ as to become figuratively "dead" to everything else (cf. Col 2:8-13). Being "in Christ", that is living one's faith as a part of the Christian community, means that a person lives exclusively for Christ. On the surface, Christians live immersed in and a part of the present world, but in his or her heart and soul a different life flows, the hidden life of faith. Paul reminds the Christians that this life of faith is the life which will endure beyond death. Thus, he admonishes the Colossians to orient their thoughts and action towards Christ, because their goal is eternal life with Christ who, after the resurrection, resides with God. They already have this life in them, and await for it to be revealed in its full glory when Christ returns.

The resurrection stories in all the Gospels begin with the women's trek to Jesus' tomb. They are the first witnesses to see that the tomb, which held the broken body of Jesus, is now empty. In the Gospel of John, Mary who was one of the most prominent women disciples of Jesus, plays that essential role. She would become not only the first witness to the empty tomb, but also the first one to encounter the risen Lord. In today's account, Mary's testimony brings two of Jesus' closest followers to the empty tomb, Peter, and John, also known as the "beloved disciple". This young man ran to the tomb as fast as he could,

driven by anxiety about what had happened to the body of his beloved master. Arriving at the tomb, and out of respect, John waited for his elder, Peter. Entering the tomb and seeing the burial shroud with the head covering neatly arranged, Peter must have realised that Jesus' body was not stolen by thieves; robbers do not neatly arrange the place which they have plundered. John also entered the tomb and, seeing it empty, with burial clothes neatly arranged, he understood and believed that Jesus truly has risen.

In this story, the evangelist highlights the absolute novelty of the resurrection. The run to the tomb symbolically represents the humanity's ardent desire for the defeat of death. The idea of resurrection and life after death is absent from the major part of the Old Testament, with the exception of the books of Daniel (12:1-3) and Wisdom (3:1-7). No wonder that the disciples, even though knowing the Scriptures, did not understand, or did not take the possibility of the resurrection seriously. Only when they see the empty tomb they realized that something extraordinary has taken place, and that death has been overcome by Jesus. John is shown as the first person who witnessed, understood and believed that all the human hopes for immortality have now come true.

The resurrection of Jesus changed everything, but it was not something that came suddenly and surprisingly. Peter's speech testifies to the fact that this victory over death and the gift of eternal life was always

intended by God. Hopes for immortality were already present among the prophets and sages of the Old Testament who grappled with the idea of life, death and God's love. Their hopes and conclusions are brilliantly summarized by the author of the book of Wisdom who stated that, "God created us for incorruption, and made us in the image of his own eternity" (Wis 2:23). This ultimate purpose of God was decisively accomplished by Jesus' resurrection. Indeed, the rejected and crucified Jesus has become the cornerstone, the foundation, of the new life for all believers.

Paul understood the essential importance of this gift of God to humanity, and admonished the Colossians to shape their daily existence in this world, in the light of Jesus' resurrection. John the disciple was the first person to see the empty tomb and believe. Subsequently, he and others testified to the resurrection which became the core of the kerygma, and the foundation of the new faith. For these reasons, the day of Christ's resurrection is the most exuberant and festive Christian celebration, the day when believers rejoice in the greatest, the ultimate gift of God. What remains is to sing together with the Psalmist, celebrating that gift with the words, "I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord."

### **Listening to the Word of God**

The greatest gift we receive today is not an Easter egg, or an expensive gift, card, present or barbecue. It is the

magnificent and supreme gift that God has given us in the shape of eternal life, and salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord. The celebration of Easter Sunday would be meaningless if we focused on the social aspect of this celebration without considering the essence of the Pascal Mysteries. A few points will help us to celebrate Easter Sunday meaningfully.

First, salvation is a universal gift for all humankind, "God wills that everyone be saved" (cf. 1 Tim 2:4). Christ suffered and died for all people, he offered himself for our sake. As people who have accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour we are saved through our faith. Yet, we also insist that salvation is not a matter of simply belonging to this or that church. We demonstrate our Christianity and faith by a life in conformity with Christian virtues and morals. Salvation is not an instant but a life-long project, which we work at with fear and trembling, which means with utmost seriousness and respect (cf. Phil 2:12). We welcome God's supreme gift of life by remaining in communion with him, by living lives that he demands of us.

Second, God has no favorites. Peter came to realize that God's intentions are universal. God fashioned humankind in his own likeness and image, and his love is for all, not just selected individuals or groups. This is well reflected in the proverb, "The rain does not recognize anyone as a friend, it drenches all equally". If we are all equal before our Creator God, then why should we consider other people infe-

rior? Why should there be tribalism, nepotism, racism, civil wars, genocide? As people who have risen with Christ, we ought to live by his command to love others with tolerance, and understanding of their differences. To live the risen life, means cleansing our minds from prejudices and stereotypes based on tribe and ethnic identity, because God's gift of life is not partial, but universal. All deserve the possibility of enjoying this gift. Third, we are reminded of our duty as Christians, to bear witness to Jesus' resurrection, by living a life that is entirely focused on supporting and defending the gift of life, in ourselves and others. After his resurrection Jesus commissioned his disciples to be witnesses not only in Jerusalem, but also to the ends of the world. As a Christian, am I living a life of witness to God's universal gift of life? For us, believers, the empty tomb of Jesus proclaims his power over death, and every kind of sickness, physical or social. It powerfully reminds us that no oppressive situation or illness is forever. When we pray to God for his intervention or healing, we see the tombstone rolled away. This Easter season God wants to deliver us most of all from the hopelessness that comes from living in the world surrounded by death, oppression and sickness. The resurrection of Christ shows that death does not have the final word, the final word of God is that which proclaims

that God's greatest gift, for all humanity, is boundless and endless life in God's presence. This gift is like the rain, which sustains us all, and to which we respond, by continually growing in our faith and Christian life-style, while seeking "what is above".

### Proverb

**“The rain does not recognize anyone as a friend, it drenches all equally.”**

### Action

#### Self-examination

Is my life focused on seeking the "things that are above" through the proper focus on the practice of faith and taking care of my spiritual life?

Do I sufficiently appreciate God's care for my life through care for my own body and well-being?

### Response to God

I make a solemn commitment to receive the daily gift of life with due attention and appreciation.

### Response to your World

In response to God's greatest gift I will share my appreciation of it with someone in the community.

In response to God's greatest gift, our group will think of an activity aimed at sharing our joy and appreciation of it with others. For example, we will organize a workshop on sustaining and protecting life among the youth in our parish.

### Prayer

Almighty God, we thank you for the greatest gift you have given us, the gift of unending life.

We humbly ask that you resurrect all that is still dead within us.

Save us from hopelessness and grant us a renewed zeal for life.

Anoint us with the power of your Holy Spirit and purify our thoughts and minds, to bear witness to you with our daily lives of care and love.

We ask you, through our Lord Jesus Christ, risen in our midst, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, forever and ever. Amen.