

That You May Believe

John 20-21

What We Found

While it was still dark, Mary Magdalene found the stone moved, and two men ran: love arrived first and waited; Peter entered first. The evidence was laundry, the linen cloths lying there and the face-cloth rolled up in a place by itself, and the beloved disciple saw and believed before any appearance had been granted. In the garden, the risen Lord took up again the question that has haunted this Gospel since its first chapter, where his first recorded words are what do you seek; to Mary he says, whom do you seek, and a weeping woman mistook him for the gardener, and her mistake, the Church has long smiled to see, told the truth: the new Adam, tending at dawn what Eden lost. He said one word, Mary, the Shepherd calling his sheep by name, and sent her as the apostle to the apostles.

That evening he gave the locked room his bequest, peace, showed the wounds his risen body still bears, and breathed on them, the only breathing of God since Genesis 2:7: receive the Holy Spirit; if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained. The Church has always heard here the institution of the sacrament of Penance: forgiveness and retention placed in apostolic hands, exercised one penitent at a time ever since (CCC 1461); the confessional stands on Easter evening's breath. Eight days later Thomas got his evidence and gave the Gospel its destination: my Lord and my God, closing the frame that opened with the Word was God, and the Lord blessed a beatitude over every reader since: blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe. That is us, by name. The purpose statement turned out to be Martha's creed, spoken at a tomb four chapters early. And on a beach at dawn, beside the New Testament's second and last charcoal fire, three questions healed three denials, and the oldest promissory note in our study was paid: you shall be called Cephas became feed my sheep. Peter's boast was finally underwritten, he will stretch out his hands, and the Gospel's story ended with its first command made last: follow me. And in the Revelation tradition joins to John, the throne shows a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain. Standing. The Lamb we beheld is not a past tense.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Gregory the Great, Homilies on the Gospels, Homily 26

The disbelief of Thomas has done more for our faith than the belief of the other disciples, for as he touches and is convinced, our own minds are settled past doubting. It was not chance that he was absent, then doubted, then touched, then believed: the doubter's hand in the wounds healed the wound of our unbelief.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Thomas Aquinas, Commentary on the Gospel of John, on chapter 20

Mary Magdalene is the *apostolorum apostola*, the apostle of the apostles. As a woman first brought the words of death to a man in Eden, so a woman is first entrusted with the words of life at the tomb. The order of the fall is reversed in the order of the announcement, and the first human voice

ever to preach the resurrection was hers.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Gospel of John, Homily 88

Jesus asks nothing about the denial and exacts no accounting of the courtyard; he asks only, do you love me, because love is the qualification he examines. And the proof of love he appoints is the care of the flock: if you love me, tend my sheep. Peter's penance is a job, and the job is love made visible until his own stretched-out hands complete it.

Live It This Week

- **Receive Easter evening's gift.** Go to Confession this week. The sacrament was instituted with the second breathing of God in history, and it is spent one penitent at a time. Kneel where the breath still works, and hear the verse happen to you in the present tense: they are forgiven.
- **Make breakfast.** After forgiving and sending, the risen Lord laid a breakfast for tired friends. Host a meal this week, for this group as its celebration, or for someone who needs one. Come and have breakfast is also a spirituality.
- **Answer him.** Once this week, in silence, let him ask you the beach question by name: do you love me? Answer honestly, even if your honest word is Peter's smaller one. Then ask him whom you are being given to feed, and write down the first name that comes.

Memory Verse

John 20:29 (RSV2CE) · keep this one

Jesus said to him, Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.

This is the Gospel's beatitude for its readers, and as of fourteen weeks ago, for this group by name. Carry it.

Where to Go from Here

The study is complete, and the following is not. Three roads. First, re-read the Gospel of John alone, one chapter a week, now that you can hear it; you will be astonished what fourteen weeks of ears can do. Second, the beloved disciple wrote letters in his old age to churches full of people who had not seen and yet believed, about light, abiding, and love one another; if this group wants a next chapter together, the Letters of St. John await in the companion study That You May Know. Third, and always: this Sunday, as the Host is raised before Communion, behold the Lamb of God, standing, as though slain, and answer the invitation to the supper with the strongest Amen of your life.

Catechism References

CCC 448, 553, 644-645, 881, 976, 1461.