

Easter – 2016 Mass During the Day

A young man in his early 20s, serving time in prison, writes to a former teacher:

“I used to have faith, or at least I used to feel it. You may remember that I used to serve Mass. I sometimes even got up early on Saturdays to do that.

“And then, well, you know what happened since then.

“I’d like to go back to those times, but I can’t. I’d like to find that faith and get it back, but I don’t know where it is right now.”

The teacher wrote back,

“You’re right, you can’t go back. But you *can go forward* and keep looking. If you are looking for the Lord, don’t worry, he’ll find you!

That’s not a perfect parallel to John’s Easter gospel, but there are enough similarities to make it worth thinking about.

Maybe Mary Magdalene had not abandoned her faith and taken up a life of crime, but it was true that the Jesus she knew was gone.

Like the young man in prison, she came to the last place she knew Jesus had been placed. And much like the young man’s prison life, it was dark. And Jesus was not there.

“The Lord has been taken away!” she cried. “We don’t know where they have put him.”

That sounds similar to what the young man was saying: “I don’t know where my faith is now.

That experience is not so uncommon. Many of us have gone through it from time to time. For some of us, that might be the way things have been for quite some time.

Perhaps, in our younger years, we practiced our faith with greater ease. If you’ve ever seen a child pray, it seems obvious that they really mean it. There’s a purity and simplicity there that we adults might envy.

And then, well, things happen—any number of things. Some good, some bad, some of our own choosing, some that happen to us unawares.

And all of a sudden we realize that we are in a much different place than where we began.

Something stirs us awake, and we realize that we need to go looking for the Lord again. And what we find is an empty tomb.

It’s difficult to make contact with an empty tomb. We get frustrated and think, “I don’t know where Jesus is anymore.”

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But the empty tomb does provide us with options.

One option is to take it, not as a disappointment, but as a sign of hope. Finding Jesus' dead body in the tomb would have been much worse. "Yup, there he is." No hope there.

But John, for one, saw that the tomb was empty and took it as a symbol of new life—new life that the disciples had to discover, realize and believe in, but new life nonetheless.

John still had no idea what the experience of the risen Lord would be like, but he believed at least this much: Death had not won the victory. Jesus lives!

One of the great themes of the Easter season has to do with the blessedness of those who believe, especially those who believe without seeing.

And we see the disciples coming to that belief in many different ways.

It may be true that, like the young man in prison, we cannot go back to what once was. We will never recapture the innocence of youth.

We've seen too much suffering and disillusionment for that. But we can go forward. And we will be blessed in doing so.

In one of the stories about the risen Lord Jesus gives Mary Magdalene the

charge of telling the disciples that he is going ahead of them—to Galilee—where they would see him.

There is an encounter with Jesus waiting ahead of us, too, and not just at the point of death.

That much we can believe in. How it will come about, and under what conditions we cannot know. Chances are we will be surprised.

But it's there, up ahead, that much we can be sure of. And it will be a blessing to us.

So, we prepare ourselves as best we can, not by pining for what has been lost, but by taking hope from the stories of our faith, and making a choice to believe that they apply to us, that they're not relics of some past golden age, but words of encouragement from a God who still loves us, and still is about saving us in the midst of the life we have, not in the one we lost.