

EASTER SUNRISE SERVICE COMMENTARY

Mary Magdalene knew Jesus well. He had cast demons out of her. He had loved her when she was still a sinner, a hopeless woman with little reason to live. He had healed her. He had forgiven her sins. She loved him. She served him well, first among the women—Peter in her preeminence and John in her love. How very appropriate that the Lord chose her to be the original witness to the greatest event in the history of mankind, to witness what generations would cling to for the hope of eternal life, to be the first to share the message the Church would proclaim forevermore: ***“He is risen, as he said. Do not be afraid.”***

Afraid—that’s what the Apostles were. Out of all the men who had been so confident and sure while Jesus was alive, out of all those who had seen Him work such wonders, it was only a few women who dared go to Jesus’ tomb?

Have any of you ever seen that clip where Babe Ruth called his home run shot. You know what I am talking about. He pointed to where he was going to hit the ball and hit it right there—home run. Jesus did the same. He told his followers and those who opposed him what he was going to do, and everything happened just as he said.

So why were the Apostles so afraid? Even worse, how could they have doubted it? Had they skipped Bible class, zoned out during his sermons, gone through the motions in the liturgy? Could they have been just like us?

Thank God, though. Jesus’ resurrection proves that they—that we—are forgiven. His death was acceptable in the Father’s sight. He did conquer death, the devil, and our own sinful natures. Jesus lives and he wants us to do the same. Take the angel’s words seriously, ***“Do not be afraid. He is risen, just as he said.”***

The angel explained, ***“He is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see him.”*** On Maundy Thursday, the day he was arrested, Jesus had said to the disciples, ***“But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”***

The angel told the Marys their Lord was on his way to Galilee now. Man, is it just me, or does the Word of God always seem to find

fulfillment? Imagine their joy. The women gladly headed out to share that wonderful message, no doubt traveling as quickly as they could, overjoyed yet nervous about what exactly would happen. Before they could even make it back to the other disciples, however, something even more amazing occurred. Jesus himself appeared. ***“Greetings.”*** They were shocked. They fell at Jesus’ feet and worshipped him, their risen Lord and Savior. They clung to him as if they were never going to let go. Jesus had not let them down. He was not dead. He had not lied. He was here with them now, risen, victorious, and they weren’t about to let this moment end.

“Do not be afraid,” Jesus said, repeating the comforting words of the angel. ***“Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”*** ***“My brothers”***—those men who had fled from him, who had abandoned him, who had let him die alone, who had hidden away in an upper room, who had doubted his message and ignored his promise. He calls them ***“my brothers.”*** Amazing! How endless is the forgiveness of our God! ***“My brothers,”*** ***“my sisters”***—these are the words he speaks to all of us today. We have sinned against him. We have failed to trust his promises perfectly. We have not studied his Word faithfully. We have doubted his love in times of trouble. Yet he looks at us and says, ***“My brothers.”***

Christ’s brothers and sisters, ***“Do not be afraid.”*** That is the summary of the entire gospel message. Though you have sinned at many times and in many ways, though you deserve nothing but wrath and punishment, ***“do not be afraid.”*** The thorns have grown their roses. The crown of death has turned into the crown of life. The wounds inflicted by sin now pour forth grace. Christ, betrayed by His own, has returned, not to punish them, but to forgive and restore. I say it again, in fact Christ says it through me: ***“Do not be afraid. He is risen. Just as he said.”*** Amen.