



THE BYZANTINE CATHOLIC EPARCHY OF PARMA

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

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Paschal Letter 2021

Christ is Risen!

Beloved brothers in the priestly and diaconal ministry, beloved nuns, beloved brothers and sisters. We have arrived at Holy Pascha and participate in the joy of the Resurrection of Our Lord! The Gospel of the Apostle and Evangelist John (John 20:1-9) describes an event at the empty tomb with these words: “On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, “They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don’t know where they put him.” So Peter and the other disciple went out and came to the tomb. They both ran, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and arrived at the tomb first; he bent down and saw the burial cloths there, but did not go in. When Simon Peter arrived after him, he went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there, and the cloth that had covered his head, not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place. Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed. For they did not yet understand the scripture that he had to rise from the dead.”

The Evangelist John describes what happened on that morning, the first day of the week, as a drama of the very personal love of Peter, John, and Mary Magdalene and their faith in Jesus Christ. These were literally His closest friends; all three loved Jesus. Although the journey of faith was different for each of them, it is the same as it is on our own journey of faith.

Mary Magdalene is described as the one who left during the darkness of the early morning and ran to the tomb. Naturally, this darkness is the symbol of the terrible gloominess that she bore in her heart. This gloominess prevented her from accepting the realities of the events of Christ’s suffering and death on the cross, but on the other side, this gloominess was what inspired her to blaze ahead. Her act of running is the expression of love and desire for the Loved One, because it shows that she could not live without the Loved One. Brothers and sisters, only love can carry us through times of darkness, doubt, and loss of faith. Only love can help us during this worldwide darkness of the Covid-19 pandemic and carry us through this very difficult situation.

Mary Magdalene finds an empty tomb, or more precisely, a stone rolled away from the tomb. This frightens her. She has her interpretation of the situation: “They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don’t know where they put him.” (John 20:2b) Her use of the plural in *we don’t know*, indicates that she was there with other women, the myrrh-bearers, as described by the other evangelists. She, however, is the only one who runs back to the disciples as a first evangelist/announcer of the message of the empty tomb and the resurrection. The empty tomb, which she found, is first a mystery and later becomes the message of hope, and it compels her even more towards finding the Loved One. It is interesting how Mary Magdalene does not speak about the dead body of Christ, but rather, she says, “They took the Lord, my Lord, and I don’t know



where they put him.” Her exclamation suggests that she is still looking for the Loved One, and not only for His dead body.

Then there are Peter and John; they both run to the tomb. This is a statement of their intimate connection, a result of the fact that they had lived with Christ for three years, and of the pain they are now experiencing. They both love Jesus. John gets to the tomb first, most likely because he is younger, but also because he is the one who is loved by the Lord; love gives him wings. Both Peter and John see the linens/wrappings but the evangelist states that in that moment, it is only John who believes. How is this possible? It is possible in that John is not burdened by the wound and pain of betrayal of the Lord; Peter’s time of faith and confession of love is yet to come. People who are wounded still have to make the journey towards faith and thus the full experience of love is more difficult.

The whole Gospel tells us how love is the beginning of faith. Love is also what opens the eyes of the loved one. True love is stronger than death and it is the love by which Jesus Christ loves us and wants us to love Him back, the One Who rose from the dead and by death trampled death and to those in the tombs granted life. He is always alive and we can live with Him.

Dear brothers and sisters, during this Pascha of 2021 I wish and pray from my heart that you open your hearts and let yourselves be changed by the love of the Risen Lord, Who destroyed the power of death, sin, and evil and Who granted us forever and ever the new life eternal.

Christ is Risen!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Milan Lach'.

The Most Reverend Milan Lach, S.J.
Bishop of the Eparchy of Parma