

*Meditations and Prayers as we
celebrate the
Resurrection of Our Lord from the
Dead*



For use at home

These reflections and meditations continue the theme of our Study Groups after the Sunday Mass, using a particular picture to help us to think more deeply about what happened when Our Lord rose from the dead, and I hope they will help us during Eastertide as we consider how he appeared to his disciples after his Resurrection. I am very grateful to Fr Beswick for helping to produce some of them. During that period of forty days, it took his friends some time to realise what had happened. It took them even longer to know that their lives could never be the same again, that he would be with them whatever might happen.

We share in that new life, here and now; we are united in our faith and by our prayers; we go forward with confidence and with hope. Please use this booklet in whatever way you find the most helpful. Do not simply read through it all at once and then put it to one side. Choose one theme and a particular picture and then let your own thoughts and reflections lead you on, as well as what is written here. If you have access to the internet, look at how other artists have portrayed that event. Then use those thoughts in a time of prayer.

You may find it helpful to have a crucifix with you or to light a candle. These are some opening prayers you might care to use:

In the name of the Father + and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

O God of unchanging power and eternal light,
look with favour on the wondrous mystery of the whole Church
and serenely accomplish the work of human salvation
which you planned from all eternity;
may the whole world come to see and know
that what was cast down is raised up,
that what had become old is made new,
and that all things are returning to perfection through him
from whom they took their origin,
our Lord Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.



THE EMPTY TOMB

It was very early on the first day of the week and still dark, when Mary of Magdala came to the tomb. She saw that the stone had been moved away from the tomb and came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved. 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb' she said 'and we don't know where they have put him.'

Mary's assumes that someone has stolen the body. The significance of the empty tomb is as hard for us to grasp as it was for those who first witnessed it. It is only evidence of a stolen body, not a miracle to be celebrated. Although it is a critical clue to what is happening, the image is pictorially underwhelming; absence is difficult to paint. And so artists wanting to express our belief had to find a much more dramatic way of showing us the Resurrection. None is more dramatic than the Resurrection painted by Grünewald for the Antonine Canons, who looked after those with an horrific skin disease akin to leprosy, in their hospital at Isenheim. When closed, the altarpiece in their chapel showed the horrific sufferings of Jesus on the Cross. When it was opened on Easter Day, the pictures showed a whole series of miracles culminating in the greatest of all, the moment of the Resurrection.

Christ rises from the tomb. The stone is cast aside and the sleeping guards are scattered as if by an explosion in the night. The trailing white linen shroud changes colour as it floats upwards with him, first turning royal red and finally gold. Except for the five wounds, his body is now intact and glorious: those wounds emit rays of golden light. His face 'shines like the sun' as it did on the mountain of the Transfiguration, and the sun itself rises behind him. This is not a literal picture, a 'photo' of the event. Grünewald shows us what, according to the Gospels, nobody saw. And he not only shows us the miracle: he compels us to see its significance. Unlike the holy women and the Apostles, we do not need to mourn or doubt beside an empty tomb. We are witnesses to the explosive triumph of light over darkness – we already realise that neither death nor life will ever be the same again. And therefore we have so much to offer to our families, friends and neighbours at this time.

We need to put this image together with the suffering and death we encounter in our world, the challenges that all of us are facing at this moment. None of us can fail to be affected by what is happening all around us: if we feel nothing, then something is wrong. But there is a firm hope here to be grasped, a sure support we can give as we pray for those who are sick, for those in mourning and for the dead. There is also a message for us to carry with us every day, that we are already sharing in that new life, that there is nothing in life or death where God will not be with us.

Prayers

O God, who on this day, through your Only-Begotten Son, have conquered death and unlocked for us the path to eternity, grant, we pray, that we who keep the solemnity of the Lord's Resurrection may, through the renewal brought by your Spirit, rise up in the light of life.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

O God, who willed that your only Son, having conquered death, should take our frail human nature into the realms of heaven, grant that those who have died, with the sufferings and frailty of this life overcome, may gaze eternally on you, their Creator and Redeemer, and draw the breath of new life among your Saints. Through Christ our Lord.

*On that first morning of the week,
Before the day began to break,
The Marys went their Lord to seek.
Alleluia!*



PETER AND JOHN GO TO THE TOMB

Peter set out with the other disciple to go to the tomb. They ran together, but the other disciple, running faster than Peter, reached the tomb first; he bent down and saw the linen cloths lying on the ground, but did not go in. Simon Peter who was following now came up, went right into the tomb, saw the linen cloths on the ground, and also the cloth that had been over his head; this was not with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in; he saw and he believed. Till this moment they had failed to understand the teaching of scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

This scene begins with panic and distress. Mary Magdalene tells Peter and John that someone has stolen the body and ‘we don’t know where they have put him’. We can see that panic and distress in the expression on their faces. This painting by Eugène Burnand, which is now the Musée d’Orsay in Paris, was produced in 1898. He came originally from Switzerland and was a deeply religious man; in this work we are shown the

depth of his faith. For if we look in more detail at the two figures we see that John is clasping his hands in prayer whilst Peter urges them on. Their eyes do not only express anxiety; there is also hope and longing there, the way that a relation or friend waits for news of someone who is sick. They are about to find the clues which will change everything, but they are still uncertain because this is a mystery far beyond our understanding or our control.

S. John is very specific in the way that he describes what happened next. Peter arrives at the tomb and it is light by now: he finds that it is not quite empty – he can see the linen cloths in which the body of Jesus had been wrapped. John arrives, pushes past him and goes into the tomb. He too sees the linen cloths and also the cloth that ‘had been over his head’. This is the Sudarium, the square of cloth which was placed flat on the face to soak up the moisture. But it has moved, for the one who was wearing it had moved. So, as he writes of himself, ‘he saw and he believed’. Only he, who had been with Jesus at the Cross and who had not run away and denied that he had ever known him, could begin to see deeper than the surface facts at this stage.

We still have those cloths. The Shroud at Turin is a 14 feet long piece of linen: all the evidence points to the fact that it is genuine. It bears the faint image of a man who has been scourged and then crucified. This is not painted but more like a scorch mark on the cloth. It is an image of someone in death. The Sudarium at Manoppello carries the face of someone who is alive; the eyes are open and the mouth is beginning to move. It also is not painted, but somehow printed on thin, gossamer-like cloth woven out of byssus, which are the threads that come from mussels to attach them to the sea bed. If you superimpose the two images, they are the same face. But none of this can prove the Resurrection. We need to go to that tomb with Peter and John, look at what we find and allow the message to sink in. Here we shall find a faith that will lead us through our panic and anxiety to rediscover hope.

Prayers

Lord my God, into the hands of your loving and tender providence
I commend my spirit; to you I abandon my hopes and fears,
my desires and dislikes, my prospects for the future.

Though my faults are many, my spiritual poverty extreme,
my hope in you surpasses all.

It is superior to my weakness, greater than my difficulties,
stronger than death.

Though temptations should assail me, I will hope in you;

Though I break my resolutions,

I will look to you confidently for grace to keep them at last,

For you are my Father, my God,

the support of my salvation.

And I am your devoted child,

who cast myself into your arms and beg your blessing.

I put my trust in you,

and so trusting, I shall not be confounded. Amen.

Father, we praise you for Christ our living Lord.

His death has destroyed death for us;

His rising has given us the promise of everlasting life

Which begins even here on earth.

In him, a new age has dawned, a broken world has been renewed

And man is once again made whole.

Help us to grasp the hope we receive in and through his Resurrection;

Help us to share his life and his healing

With all those we meet,

For he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

One God, for ever and ever. Amen.



MARY MAGDALENE MEETS THE RISEN CHRIST

Mary stayed outside near the tomb, weeping. Then, still weeping, she stooped to look inside, and saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head, the other at the feet. They said, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' 'They have taken my Lord away' she replied 'and I don't know where they have put him.' As she said this she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, though she did not recognise him. Jesus said, 'Woman, why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and remove him.' Jesus said, 'Mary!' She knew him then and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbuni!' – which means Master. Jesus said to her, 'Do not cling to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go and find the brothers, and tell them: I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' So Mary of Magdala went and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord and that he had said these things to her.

According to the Gospels, Mary Magdalene who is the first to see the empty tomb is also the first to see the Risen Christ. At first she does not recognise him, at least, not until he says her name. Then she reaches out to him. The full emotion of this scene has been captured by Titian. It was painted in Venice in 1510 and it is quite small, intended originally to be seen in a private room. Mary Magdalene, her hair catching the early morning light, kneels on the ground; under her left hand is a jar of ointment, the perfume poured over the feet of Jesus by the 'woman who was a sinner'; her right hand moves towards him. Christ bends away from the hand; but he also bends towards her, comforting and sheltering. He holds a hoe, reassuring us that we should not be surprised that she mistook him for the gardener. All these contrasts are emphasised by the landscape. Whilst the ground on which Mary kneels is brown and barren, Our Lord is standing amongst new and green plants. Behind Mary are the buildings of the town, of the comforts of ordinary life in this world. That is also the side on which the unseen tomb must be. Behind Jesus there is a flock of sheep and the blue sky of heaven, reminding us that this Good Shepherd will lead us all to the pastures of everlasting life. There is so much here, and as you look you will notice more and more details.

This meeting begins in despair and ends in joy and hope. Mary cannot believe that this is Jesus and that he is alive again because she is sunk in grief and has made up her mind that someone must have stolen the body. That is still firmly fixed in her mind when the figure approaches her. hers is a grief which all of us will know, at some time or another, when we begin to face the death of someone we love. We cannot at that point see beyond the sorrow. It is then that the Risen Christ comes to us. For a while we cannot see him; we are not convinced that this new life is true. But if we allow him to do it, he will comfort us and shelter us, until we can see him. He will convince us that death is not the end.

The title of the picture is 'Noli me tangere' - 'Do not touch me'. It all sounds very literal in the Latin. But the sense of the original Greek is as in our translation above 'Do not cling to me'. You cannot keep me here because this life cannot be contained in this world. I am going to my Father, in order to take you through death and into life with me. And it is that faith which will, in the end, help us to get everything back into proportion.

Prayers

O God, whose Only-Begotten Son
entrusted Mary Magdalene before all others
with announcing the great joy of the Resurrection,
grant, we pray, that through her intercession and example
we may proclaim the living Christ
and come to see him reigning in glory.
Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Father, help my faith to grow,
that I may, in all the circumstances of my life,
know that you are with me,
so that one day I may see your face
and rejoice in your presence. Amen.



THOMAS WAS NOT WITH THEM WHEN JESUS CAME

In the evening of that same day, the first day of the week, the doors were closed in the room where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them, 'Peace be with you', and showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord.

Thomas, called the Twin, who was one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. When the disciples said, 'We have seen the Lord', he answered, 'Unless I see the holes that the nails made in his hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe.' Eight days later the disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them. The doors were closed, but Jesus came in and stood among them. 'Peace be with you' he said. Then he spoke to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; look, here are my hands. Give me your hand; put it into my side. Doubt no longer but believe.' Thomas replied, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him:

'You believe because you can see me.

Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe.'

The full drama and emotion of this scene is captured stunningly by Caravaggio. He was a master in the art of *chiaroscuro*, the use of light and shade and shadow and this was painted by him during the height of his popularity in the city of Rome, in 1602. He used models from real life for his painting: there is nothing stylised, staid or artificial about what he was able to create. He painted this, incidentally, four years before he was imprisoned and had to flee from the city after being accused of killing one of the locals in a fight. He was nearly always in trouble! He died in 1610 at the age of 38.

There are no details of background or setting in this painting, nothing to distract the eye. We see just three of the Apostles and our focus is drawn to Thomas' finger as Our Lord guides his arm towards the wound. Thomas is not actually looking at Christ: his eyes are fixed beyond the figure as he finally comes to realise the reality of what has happened. He realises also the foolishness of what he has said, and that Our Lord already knows about the boldness of his words and the weakness of his faith. By contrast, we do not see the hands of the other Apostles, but their gaze is transfixed by what is happening. This is the physical evidence of Christ as a man in this world, yet risen from the dead and no longer bound by the rules of human existence. Thomas' carelessness and rough nature is perhaps also expressed by the tear in the sleeve of his tunic. He has not long come into the house, which is why he is still half-wearing his cloak.

It is important that we realise that Jesus rose from the dead in his human body. The tomb was empty, he was seen to be alive. This is not a disembodied spirit; he eats with his Apostles: he can be touched; he is real. Yet he can appear in rooms behind locked doors, he comes to prove the reality of the Resurrection. It was in that body that he was taken up into heaven. So many times, the children at school have asked me one very sensible question: 'Where is the body of Jesus now?' And the answer is always the same: 'In heaven'. All that we are is taken up into glory. Although when we die, our physical remains are separated from our soul and remain on this earth because of sin, at the end of time, when this world comes to an end, all that we are will be reunited. So it is that in the Apostles Creed, the earliest form of a Christian Creed, we profess our faith in 'the Resurrection of the body and the life everlasting'.

Prayers

Lord Jesus Christ, I believe and trust
that you are the Only-Begotten Son of God, the Saviour of the world.
But, like your Apostle Thomas, I am troubled by doubts and uncertainties.
Because he loved you, you showed yourself to him,
and confirmed his failing faith with loving compassion.
Keep my heart true to you in faith, hope and love,
despite the darkness of my mind.
You have promised blessedness to those who do not see,
but yet believe.
Fulfil your promise, draw near to me in your holy Word,
in your Sacraments and in the communion of your Church.
Send forth your light and your truth, let these be my guide.
With hands of faith stretched out to you
let me touch your saving wounds,
so that in truthfulness and trust I can say with Thomas,
'My Lord and my God'. Amen.

My Lord and my God, the joy of my heart,
I cannot know you fully in this life,
But let me grow here in your knowledge and love,
So that in the world to come
I may find the fullness of love and knowledge.
Let me live here in joyful hope, so that I may come one day
To the fulfilment of all hope and joy.
Lord, you have promised that whatever we ask through your Son
We shall receive, so that our joy may be complete.
Trusting in the truth of your word, I ask what you have promised,
Let my mind dwell on it, my heart love it,
My mouth speak it, my soul hunger for it,
My flesh thirst for it, my whole being long for it,
Till I enter at last into the joy of my Lord,
One God in Three Persons, blessed for ever.
Amen.

S. Anselm



THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, “What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?” And they stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” And he said to them, “What things?” And they said to him, “Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since this happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body; and they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb, and found it just as the women had said; but him they did not see.” And he said to them, “O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have

spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He appeared to be going further, but they constrained him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight. They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?" And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven gathered together and those who were with them, who said, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Perhaps the most beautiful of all of the Gospel texts that are found only in S. Luke, and rendered here for us by Caravaggio. As we have already learnt, Caravaggio was no stranger to the adventures of life, and he certainly seems to have imported some 'characters' into this painting. One of the disciples, with holes in the elbows of his green coat, is about to spring to his feet in amazement, on learning the identity of their mysterious companion. The other disciple wears the badge of a pilgrim, a cockleshell (very familiar to people of Caravaggio's time), on his workman's leather shoulder-cape and has features that might politely be described as 'lived-in'. His arms are outstretched, perhaps in exclamation? Perhaps in referring back to what he had so recently seen unfold on Calvary? Perhaps also in a way that foretells the manner of his own death some time in the future? And then there is the inn-keeper, looking on with interest, maybe having heard something of Jesus of Nazareth but never having met him or any of his followers. He is a steady-looking man, with his thumbs tucked into his apron, suggesting that he has been standing there awhile as he listens to what the Lord has to say. Caravaggio has also prepared a feast of meaning for us on the table with finely detailed food and drink: the bread and the wine pointing us towards the Mass, the central mystery of our Christian worshipping life. The vine leaf, the water and the grapes all do likewise. It was in the breaking of the bread that the disciples recognized their Lord: not in the walking or the talking. Perhaps

that was because they saw, at close quarters, the Lord's hands once again performing this familiar action, an action they had witnessed so many times before: in the open air with great crowds, together in the intimacy of the daily hidden life they shared during the years of the Lord's public ministry, or perhaps finally and most recently in the Upper Room at the Last Supper. The account of the journey to Emmaus raises more questions than it answers, but as it does so it helps us to remember three important features of our life as followers of the Risen Jesus. Firstly, that it is in the breaking of the bread (that is, in the Mass) that we most surely come into the actual presence of the risen Lord and are best placed to know him, to love him *and be loved by him* and to receive what he has to say to us in his Holy Word. Secondly, that life for us (like it was for his first followers) can often be fairly down to earth, with a bit of rough and tumble thrown in for good measure. We might well find ourselves led into paths and places that we would never have chosen ourselves. Thirdly, there are those around us (like the inn-keeper) who, whilst not 'paid-up church goers', nonetheless understand the things of God very well and then help us to understand them too.

Prayers

Lord Jesus, as you came to those first disciples on the road to Emmaus, so I pray that you will make yourself known to me today. At this time I cannot join in the breaking of the bread at Mass, but ask instead that you will be my guest in my home. Help me, like you helped those first disciples, to know you, to love you and to follow you. When life is difficult or uncertain, help me to trust in you; when I am fearful, help me to recognize your voice above the anxieties of my own heart. At the last, Lord, keep me and those for whom I now pray (*here name those in special need at this time*) safe from all harm and bring us rejoicing to your kingdom, there to be with you forever. Amen.

Thanks be to thee, my Lord Jesus Christ
for all the benefits thou hast given me,
for all the pains and insults thou hast borne for me.
O most merciful Redeemer, friend and brother,
may I know thee more clearly,
love thee more dearly,
and follow thee more nearly, day by day. Amen.

S. Richard of Chichester



THE RISEN CHRIST ON THE SHORE

Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, have you any fish?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, for the quantity of fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his clothes, for he was stripped for work, and sprang into the sea. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off.

When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish lying on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three of them; and although there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Again, in this Resurrection account, we begin with the disciples failing to recognize the Lord Jesus. They had spent so much time with him and they loved him so dearly, and yet somehow, for God's mysterious purposes, he was 'hidden' from them at first. In this painting, by Duccio, we see some of the disciples still hard at work, hauling in the full fishing net. Peter looks serene as he approaches the Lord: he is distracted from the business of fishing by the presence of his beloved master, and so are some of the other disciples. As with the Road to Emmaus, more questions are raised than are answered by this passage from S. John's Gospel: why do the disciples not recognize Jesus? Why does Jesus ask them to bring some of the fish they have just caught when he already has fish cooking on the fire, together with some bread? What was it that caused the disciples to realize who it was but why did they not dare to ask him? We don't know much about the artist Duccio, who lived in the late 13th/early 14th Centuries, though his picture teaches us several important home truths about Church life: it was presumably the same then as it is now! Firstly: although we have plenty of 'work' to get on with in the Church (think of all the different jobs that need to be done, week by week, to keep the Church running—from cleaning to banking to flowers; from music to serving to Sunday School; from ringing the bell to keeping the boilers and rooves in good repair to emptying the recycling....the list goes on) nothing matters more than allowing ourselves to be 'distracted' by the Lord Jesus. That is who we are: a group of people who have this 'distraction' in common. All the other jobs need to be done in order to create and sustain a place in which we can be 'distracted', that is called apart from the busy world and into discipleship of him. Secondly, although he sets us to work, and invites us to contribute the fruits of our labours, as he did with these first fishermen in helping them catch the fish and then asking them to bring some ashore: we need to remember that the fish is *already on the fire*, it is always *already on the fire*. We have a part to play in his work of 'bringing in the harvest', perhaps an important part, certainly a part that no one else has been called to play: but it doesn't all depend on us and on our success or failure. All that matters is that we do our best, with a willing and trusting heart. The rest is up to him. Alleluia!

Prayers

Dear Lord, as we celebrate with renewed joy these days of your Resurrection, help us to remember that you are at work in our midst, calling others to come and join us. Help us to play our part in welcoming them and bringing out the best in one another, so that an unbelieving world may see something of your new and risen life in the life that we share together in our Church. Amen.

God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission. I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good; I shall do His work. I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it if I do but keep His commandments. Therefore, I will trust Him, whatever I am, I can never be thrown away. *S. John Henry Newman*

