

2021 Easter Morning

“Your life is hid with Christ in God.” This mysterious phrase captures for us the experience of the resurrection. It expresses at once the seen and unseen nature of the resurrection at work within us, just like the experience of Mary who, though in the presence of Christ outside the tomb, nonetheless does not recognize him until he makes himself known. **There are two ways of entering into the mystery of the resurrection and both are essential to having a full experience of the risen Jesus.** The first is given to us by Peter who proclaims the whole kerygma to Cornelius’ household. The second is given to us by Mary who through a personal encounter comes to experience the hidden power of the risen Lord. **“I have seen the Lord.”**

Alexandre Havard, in his recent book, *Free Hearts*, opens with an event in his life when he was addressing an audience of politicians in Kenya, on virtuous leadership. One famous senator, a huge strapping man, who engaged more than once in physical brawls with other politicians but was also known for his sense of humor, grabbed the microphone and blurted out: “Alexandre, you are preaching to the wrong public. We are politicians precisely because we are not virtuous people. All of us here are bandits, and perhaps even criminals. That is our job.” Alexandre, with great intuition presented the kerygma and the problem of evil very effectively when he replied, “Sir, the fact that you are a bandit and a criminal is not the problem...No, the problem is not that you are bad...The problem of evil is not evil itself. It is the diminution of the person, the shrinking of the heart, the stunting of the spirit it entails, and the damage this provokes.”¹ **Our sins make us small,**

¹ Alexandre Havard, *Free Hearts: Understanding Your Deepest Motivations* (New Rochelle, NY: Scepter, 2020), vii-viii.

unaccountable, nobody. We lose all sense of goodness and truth. Most of all, we become adept at condemning ourselves or numbing our consciences. **Our sins cry out for the justice and mercy of God, the name of Jesus who saves.**

Consider how Peter preaches to us today: “God raised him on the third day and made him manifest... he commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that he is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead... every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” (Acts 10:40, 42-43) Peter gives us solid guidance about preaching.

If you have suffered evil and injury at the hands of others and are appalled by the growth of evil, begin with Jesus the universal judge of all sins.

If you are filled with pain for your own sins, then begin with the mercy of God who through the resurrection of Jesus expiates all the sins of anyone who calls upon his saving name. In Jesus’ name is both mercy and justice, both faith and love, both compassion and sincerity.

These two dimensions of the Easter proclamation also carry the key to removing the opposition between Christian belief and Christian living. A Christian lives truthfully but he or she also lives mercifully, compassionately. He lives by faith but is also active in works of mercy. He is true to the name that saves him.

Consider Mary. Jesus drove out seven demons from her body. She knew the personal hold that evil can have on someone. In her encounter with the mercy of the rabbi Jesus she had not yet

experienced the power of his judgement on the Prince of this world. Nonetheless, she gained such a great courage and compassion for the man who healed her that she followed him to his own crucifixion and death. Yet when she arrived at the tomb that first Easter morning, she was still in the tomb of her past. **The tomb of this life is our sins written on our conscience with indelible ink;** our failures that lift their countenance upon us whenever we want to do good; our omissions that imprison us in the past and make us small.

She comes early to the tomb. She thinks someone broke into the tomb and stole the body of Jesus. She grieves deeply over his death. She is still in the past. **She has not yet crossed the threshold of death.** Grave robbery and not resurrection is on her mind. Mary had experienced what it was like to fall into the hands of the devil and **she experienced that nobody else could save her but Jesus.**

Our believing and living the Gospel does not happen simply from the dry exercise of the head trying to hold together the concepts of mercy and justice, but in the encounter of the heart with the one who is mercy and justice itself. The one who knows my heart calls me by name. He has known my name from all eternity. **Mary!**