

Easter Sunday 2026 – John 20:1-9

The time is early and it is still dark, which means for John that Christ who is the 'light of the world' is absent. Three disciples react to this absence. ***Which one are we?***

Mary Magdalene is the ***first***, we read only the first half of her story, but we notice how her faith is at an early stage. Her devotion brought her to the tomb, but the missing body can only mean that someone has taken it away. Jesus himself will have to search her out to bring her to full believe.

The ***second*** is Peter. At the end of the discourse on the Bread of Life, he made an impressive personal commitment to Jesus but later denied three times that he even knew him. So wounded was he spiritually by these denials that even though he saw the grave clothes lying there, he could not conclude to the truth.

The ***third*** disciple is not named, but he has already appeared at the side of Jesus at the supper and was present at the foot of the cross. He enjoyed this intimacy with Jesus because he already had the right relationship with him, that of mutual love. For this reason, he could run faster than Peter and he drew the correct conclusion from the grave clothes which he saw in the tomb. He himself a model believer, he became not only the authority for his community for the material contained in this gospel, but an example to them. They were to believe as he believed; their relationship to Jesus was to be that of friends, not servants.

He represents all faithful disciples of Jesus through all ages of the church. Their loving intimacy with Jesus ensures that though they do not see Jesus physically, they believe without seeing.

I have always loved this commentary by Fr. Peter Edmonds, a Jesuit whom I knew in Africa and was a frequent teacher at our Novitiate Program. I still use his notes as a reference. But what he is writing is nothing new, but it sure is clear and great place to leap-off from in our own reflections on these readings.

I can see myself in all three examples as I look back on my own spiritual life journey. And that is at least one of the purposes of our gospel readings, not only to wonder which one am I, but how do each one of us progress along the road of spiritual growth, or even better, along the road to Emmaus where Jesus leads the disciples through the Scriptures.

At the Last Supper Discourse that Jesus had with his disciples after he washed their feet, he points out they are no longer slaves, but friends, *philia* in Greek. This was Peter's response to Jesus after the Resurrection when Jesus asked Peter if he loved him. *Phila* is love between friends. But Jesus wants to move Peter beyond that point of friendship to a love that one is willing to die for another, and to die not just for Jesus.

The Beloved Disciple, or the Disciple whom Jesus loved, *agape*, is the love that one is willing to die for another. As I mentioned in another homily on Good Friday (?), we are that Beloved Disciple standing at the foot of the cross with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, with a love we are willing to die for. The Beloved Disciple put his life on the line and stood there at the feet of the executed Jesus and his Mother. The Beloved Disciple is anyone who is willing stand in the feet, so to speak, of the Beloved Disciple at the cross. This is the Marianist Icon that hangs in our main entrance in Rome, where our headquarters are located.

I went to a seminary high school ran by the Precious Blood Fathers and at the end of graduating, I decided that I am not ready to continue on the journey to the priesthood. Within a few weeks after my Christmas break from my first year at college, I surprised my parents when I told them I had enlisted in the Navy. As I look back, it was probably the best decision I had made at the time.

I put my relationship with the Lord on a hold, *philia*. In bootcamp, I stopped attending Mass but ironically was asked to play for the Protestant services. I was so bad that they quickly found someone else. After that I was not involved with any church service until after my service in the Navy. I continued my education at the University of Dayton, thanks to the ***GI Bill***.

It was through my further education at the University of Dayton that I met the Marianist Brothers, and started going back to Mass. I was caught, *agape*? Religious life was similar to the military, but with a different emphasis. The military gave me the discipline that I needed in life, but the Marianists gave me the discipline that I needed in my spiritual life.

The reason I put the question mark after *agape* is that the measure of *agape* love is that one is willing to die for another, like the Beloved Disciple. I hope that is never tested for any of us, but it will take a lifetime to prepare, just in case. And the way to prepare is through the day to day *agape* loving of one another.