

Reflection on the Gospel-Easter Sunday Year A

(Matthew 28:1-10)

-Veronica Lawson RSM

After death, Jesus is cared for by a faith-filled man in the presence of two faith-filled women. These three people are fearless in the face of possible reprisals for their support of a “political criminal”. Joseph, who comes from Arimathea, a little village just north of Jerusalem, cares for Jesus out of his personal wealth, providing a clean linen cloth and his own newly rock-carved tomb. With his own hands, he performs the burial ritual, lays Jesus’ body in the tomb, and rolls the stone into place. The women disciples who witness the closing of the tomb are both named Mary. One is from Magdala, centre of a fish-salting industry by the Sea of Galilee, and the other is the mother of two male disciples. These women have contributed their goods and services to Jesus over the long journey from Galilee to Jerusalem.

The two women set out at dawn ‘to see the tomb’. This seems a little strange until we realise that they are once again functioning as witnesses, this time to the dramatic opening of the tomb and the appearance of God’s interpretive messenger. ‘Seeing’ becomes a metaphor for insight. In the earthquake phenomenon and the allusion to lightning, there are echoes of other great moments of God’s appearing to Israel, such as the encounter with Moses and the giving of the Law on Mt Sinai.

The two Marys are the first to learn the news of Jesus’ resurrection. They are also the first to be commissioned to proclaim it. The women ‘see’ the place where he was laid. They obey the angel’s command not to be afraid but to go quickly to the scattered disciples and inform them that the risen Jesus has gone before them to Galilee, the place of mission, where they too will ‘see’ him. Resurrection life energises these faith-filled women disciples/apostles and negates the death-dealing power of the Roman Empire. Ironically, the Roman tomb guards become ‘as though dead’.

As the women hurry away from the tomb, Jesus comes to meet them. He addresses them with the familiar greeting, ‘Chairete’, a greeting of joy. This is the first appearance of the risen Jesus and it draws from the women a profoundly reverential response: taking hold of him, they fall down in worship, an action foreshadowed by the courageous but doubly marginalised Canaanite woman (15:25). Jesus reiterates the commission already delivered by the angel: not to be afraid and to let the men know what has happened. These same men will later be commissioned on the mountain top (Matt 28:16-20). Often, the temptation is to stay on the mountain, instead of recognising the appearances of the Risen One on the open road of life and getting on with the mission.