

## Homily for Monday in Easter Week

April 13, 2020

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

*Acts 2:14, 22b–32; Psalm 16:8–11; Matthew 28:9–15*

This morning the lesson from the Acts of the Apostles is an excerpt from the speech Peter gives, when on the day of Pentecost, devout people have rushed together to observe the phenomenon of the Holy Spirit falling on the apostles, including the new apostle, Matthias. The people are amazed because all of them hear the apostles speaking in tongues in their own languages—the apostles are speaking Aramaic, with a vocabulary and accent contemporaries would recognize as making them Galileans.<sup>1</sup>

No one was recording Peter's sermon or memorizing it. Following the rules of rhetoric and writing that were known by Luke the evangelist, the sermon is appropriate for the person and the subject. It's the first missionary sermon by an apostle. The innocent Jesus was, for God's purposes, executed. Peter and the other apostles were witnesses of his death and of his resurrection.

I haven't seen the 1977 television mini-series *Jesus of Nazareth*, for a long time. It's one of my favorite

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<sup>1</sup>Luke 2:7. See Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991), 43. See also, Matthew 26:29; Mark 14:70; Luke 22:59.

filmed about Jesus and his death and resurrection. I've always remembered the last words of one of the characters, whose name doesn't appear in the New Testament, who played the role of a priest named Zerah—played by Ian Holm. Zerah goes to the empty tomb. He goes into the tomb, sees the cloths, and says, “Now it begins. It all begins.”<sup>2</sup>

Our Mass readings today are borrowed from our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters. Their liturgical leaders did a lot of things right in the 1960s but not everything. Most Christians, being Roman Catholics, are never permitted to hear the Risen Jesus speak at the Easter Vigil, when the gospel is from Matthew, or the Masses of Easter morning, when the gospel is from John.

In their appointed passage from John,<sup>3</sup> Peter and the unnamed disciple, known only as the disciple Jesus loved, are at the tomb. The passage ends with these words, “For as yet they did not know the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.”<sup>4</sup> These two disciples leave to go back to their homes. Our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters never hear on Easter Day the rest

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=50liF1rTTGQ>, 6:1534.

<sup>3</sup> John 20:1–9.

<sup>4</sup> John 20:9.

of John's account of the morning of resurrection at the tomb.

Mary Magdalene is still there, standing outside the tomb and weeping. As she weeps, she stoops to look in. She sees two angels sitting where Jesus' body had lain. They ask her, "Women, why are you weeping?"<sup>5</sup> When she turns to leave, she does not know that Jesus has been standing behind her. She does not recognize him even when he also asks her, "Women, why are you weeping?" He then speaks her name, and she is born again to eternal life.

The Greek noun for "apostle" never appears in John's gospel. "Apostle" is the noun form derived from the Greek verb meaning "to send." The Risen Lord sends Mary Magdalene as his first "messenger," that is "apostle," of the resurrection—not Peter, not the disciple whom he loved. Jesus said to her, "Go to my brothers and sisters and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."<sup>6</sup>

When I was double checking my homily for the Easter Vigil, I discovered that I was close to being correct when I said Matthew's account of the resurrection is

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<sup>5</sup> John 20:13.

<sup>6</sup> John 20:17. My translation.

the historic gospel for the Great Vigil of Easter in the Christian West.<sup>7</sup> But though we have heard all of Matthew’s narrative of Easter morning since 1979, I realized that Jesus’ words to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, “Go and tell my brothers and sisters to go to Galilee, and there they will see me”<sup>8</sup> were only heard by Roman Catholics at the Easter Vigil from 1969 until 1981. In 1969 Paul VI was pope, in 1981 John Paul II. (For what it’s worth, it’s hard for me to think that all of the women who were with Jesus behind stayed in Jerusalem.) In two gospels, Jesus has no problem sending women to tell the Good News that he has risen. With respect, they are the first apostles.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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<sup>7</sup> Roman Catholics and others who follow the Revised Common Lectionary hear the synoptic gospels accounts of the resurrection successively in the three-year cycle at the Easter Vigil. With the permission of the bishop of New York, we continue to use the 1979 Lectionary of the Prayer Book. Thus, we hear always hear Matthew on Easter Eve and John on Easter Day in Year A, Mark in Year B, and Luke in Year C.

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 28:10. My translation. For more on the role of women in the Johannine community see Sandra M. Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, 2nd ed. (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2003), 93–114.