

Reflection on the Gospel-Easter Sunday Year A

(Matthew 28:1-10)

-Veronica Lawson RSM

Easter invites us to celebrate life in its fullest sense. It is anything but easy to celebrate life, however, when tens of thousands in the Earth community are facing death, when hundreds of thousands are ill and countless others are struggling to put food on their tables. Resurrection faith calls us to be fearless in our support of those most deeply affected.

A faith-filled man and two faith-filled women prepare Jesus for burial. These three people are fearless in the face of possible reprisals for their support of a “political criminal”. Joseph of Arimathea 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 in Galilee and the other is the mother of two male disciples. These women have contributed their goods and services to Jesus on the journey from Galilee to Jerusalem.

The women set out at dawn “to see the tomb” This seems strange until we realise that they are functioning as witnesses, this time to the dramatic opening of the tomb and the appearance of God’s interpretive messenger. “Seeing” is 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 and the first 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 inform the scattered disciples that the resurrected 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 on the path or the road. He addresses them with a familiar greeting of joy, *Chairete*. This is the first appearance of the resurrected One and it draws from the women a profoundly reverential response: taking hold of him, they fall down in worship. Jesus reiterates the commission already delivered by the angel: not to be afraid and to let the men know what has happened. The male disciples will later be commissioned on the mountain top (Matthew 28:16-20). All are commissioned, first the women, then the men. Those “on the mountain top” must not succumb to the temptation of remaining there. They must join those on the road or the path in fearlessly bringing life to Earth’s afflicted.