

EASTER WEDNESDAY REFLECTION

Acts 2:36-41 John 20:11-18

It was a beautiful day in March of 2018 in Ghana. Hundreds of us had gathered at the Cemetery for the burial of my grandmother. She was a lovely grandmother and now we were at the cemetery, to say goodbye to her.

I had not let myself cry. After her death, I stayed busy handling some of the logistics of the funeral services.

But then, we reached the end of the prayers at the cemetery. My grandmother's casket was lowered into the ground, while we sang, "And I will raise you up."

Then, it was over. I stood there. And for the first time, I gave myself permission to feel the overwhelming sense of loss, of anger, of absence, of confusion, of hopelessness... all of which was swirling inside of me.

And, for the first time since my grandmother died, I started to cry. No, that's not the right word. I started to weep. I could not catch my breath.

And then, someone put his arm around me and pulled me to himself. I knew it was a man because my tears were dripping onto his clothes. But I did not know who it was... my eyes were closed, my heart was broken. And when I did open my eyes I could not see anything clearly... my vision was blurry, because my eyes were full of tears.

I was not alright. I needed to cry, in the embrace of someone I could not see at that moment, because my eyes were full of tears.

I don't know how long we stood there, but at some point the fellow who was hugging me simply said one word: "Adusei." And as soon as I heard his voice, as soon as I heard the way he said my name, I knew who it was. Before I could see him clearly, I could tell who it was by the sound of his voice.

It was a dear friend, a school mate. When I heard his voice, I knew who it was. I could breathe again. And the tears subsided just enough so that I could look up at him, I could see him, and I could say "thank you."

On this Easter week, we have been reading/listening to post-resurrection accounts from the Acts of the Apostles and Gospels. And I want to confess to you that, for years, when I would read these passages, I wondered how was it possible that Mary of Magdala could not recognize the risen Jesus as he stood right in front of her?

I often thought, "If my grandmother came back from the dead and stood in front of me, I would recognize her right away!"

Jesus loved Mary of Magdala. And she loved him. Jesus had given her hope. She followed him and was dedicated to his message about the Reign of God.

She was so dedicated that, on Sunday morning after that terrible Friday on which Jesus had died, Mary went to the tomb... maybe to anoint him.

What she found was confusing. The large stone rolled away from the entrance of the tomb.

Peter and the others came to investigate. And Mary... Mary sat a few feet from the entrance of the tomb, weeping.

The Risen Lord stands before Mary... and at first she thinks he's the gardener. Mary's life had been changed by the love of Jesus. So how could she possibly not recognize him? Well, maybe she could not see him clearly, because her eyes were full of tears. Maybe that weeping filled her eyes with so many tears that she could not see him clearly, even though he was right in front of her, loving her.

And notice... as soon as she hears his voice say her name, she understands. She understands who it is, she understands he is there, he is risen, he is alive.

Maybe her weeping is transformed to tears of joy. Now that she hears his voice and sees his face, the healing begins. And she understands that she has a ministry and mission, to go forth and announce the good news of resurrection.

Mary's tears happened at Easter. And, during THIS Easter week, many of us have tears in our eyes. I think of the families who have experienced the death of a loved one in recent weeks – whether it's from the Coronavirus, or some other medical issue. Every death is hard. And now we cannot even celebrate funerals the way we normally do. Tears.

I think of elderly people who are isolated right now. They cannot go out. Their grandchildren cannot come to visit. Tears.

I think of families impacted by the closing of businesses. People wondering how they will feed their families if this goes on much longer. Tears.

I think of healthcare workers and their families. Lots of exhausted people who are scared of getting infected and yet they still show up for work every day. Tears.

I think of parents who wake up in the middle of the night, anxious about the safety of their family. Tears.

And I think of Christians, Catholics around the world who can't safely go to church because they're still on lockdown. Tears. Tears because they are hungry for the Eucharist. Tears because they miss their brothers and sisters in their parish communities. Tears because this whole situation is just so odd, so baffling, so scary.

Is everything falling apart? Is there hope?

I felt that way at the cemetery in 2018 in Ghana during my grandmother's burial. Mary of Magdala felt that way at the tomb in Jerusalem. Tears. Weeping.

On this Easter week, we are invited to embrace this truth. As our eyes fill with tears, there is, in fact, someone who embraces us without saying a word. And he is there – maybe not wearing funeral clothes. He is there - wearing the scars which show us where the nails went into his hands, and where the lance went into his side.

When we have tears in our eyes, the one who embraces us is Jesus... even if we cannot see him... even if we don't recognize him... even if we are not sure who is giving us the strength to get through the moment... we may not see him clearly, because our eyes are filled with tears.

But he is there, he is here... and when the time is right, he will say the one thing we need to hear. He will say our name. As only he can say it. And deep within, we know that we are loved, and we have hope. We know that life will be blessed again. Amen

Fr Patrick