

“Tell us, Mary, what you saw on the way”

Elizabeth Johnson, Fordham University

Lincoln Center 4/14, Rose Hill 4/21/2015

Easter Sunday sequence: *Victimae paschali laudes*

Christians, offer your thankful praises to the paschal victim.

A lamb redeems the sheep;

Christ who is innocent reconciles sinners to the Father.

Death and life contended in a stupendous battle;

the Prince of life, who died, reigns alive.

Tell us, Mary, what you saw on the way.

"I saw the tomb of Christ living and the glory of his rising,

Angels attesting, the clothes and the shroud.

Christ my hope is arisen; he goes before you into Galilee."

We know that Christ is truly risen from the dead.

Have mercy on us, victorious King. Amen. Alleluia.

Some strategies of interpretation:

1. tip of the iceberg

2. the meaning of absence:

“And those who ate the loaves numbered five thousand men” (Mark 6:44).

“And those who ate were about five thousand men, not counting the women and children” (Matt 14:21).

3. generic words taken to be inclusive

4. prescriptive texts often descriptive

Gospel of Mark (15:40-41, 46-47; 16:1-3)

There were also women looking on from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of the younger James and of Joses, and Salome. These women had followed him when he was in Galilee and ministered to him. There were also many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem. ...

Having bought a linen cloth, [Joseph of Arimathea] took him down, wrapped him in the linen cloth and laid him in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance to the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses watched where he was laid. ...

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go and anoint him. Very early when the sun had risen, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb. They were saying to one another, “Who will roll back the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?”

Paul’s Letter to the Romans 16:1-16 (Ten of the 29 people Paul greeted are women leaders.)

I commend to you Phoebe our sister, a deacon of the church at Cenchræe, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the holy ones, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a benefactor to many and to me as well. Greet Prisca and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I am grateful but also all the churches of the Gentiles; greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epænetus, who was the first convert for Christ in Asia. Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives and my fellow prisoners; they are outstanding among the apostles and they were in Christ before me. Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our co-worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus. Greet my relative Herodion. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus. Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet my beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord. Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine. Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers who are with them. Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the holy ones who are with them. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

Bible in hand,
I slip behind a wall of time
to walk with the women on their way to the tomb.

“Are you afraid?” I ask,
panting to keep up with them -
they are strong from three years of walking.

“Of course,” they answer,
“but his body must be anointed!”
They keep walking.

“There’s no one to roll away
the stone,” I object.
Are they courageous, or just naive?

“There’s no one else to anoint him,”
they counter firmly,
and keep walking.

Ahead I see sunlight
glinting off Roman steel. “There’s no one
to protect you!” I protest.

They nod and keep walking,
their jars of fragrant oil balanced and full.
Crazy but courageous, I decide.

“Godspeed, then,” I say,
as I shift my life on my shoulders
and retreat to my safe, familiar world.

But the road on which I find myself
is crowded with people in need
of every kind of anointing.

“And Godspeed to you,” I hear the women call
across the veil of centuries
as I pick up my jar and start walking.