First Week of Easter

## **Monday 2 April**

Scripture: Acts 2:14. 22-33; Psalm 15/16; Matthew 28: 8-15 (but suggest reading from verse 1)

 *The women left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, ‘Greetings!’*

As a word marking the beginning of a new era of the world, “Greetings!” seems an odd choice to 21st century ears; it almost has the feel of a “first contact” opening line – the first encounter between alien species. It probably ranks higher than “hello” – but for women overcome with a heady mix of fear and joy this “Greetings! must have been one of the greatest understatements in history!

* How else could Jesus have greeted these women fresh from the empty tomb?
* When have you had a similar experience – high excitement and then a word or action that seemed to reinforce it because it was so under-stated?

Play the scene out in your imagination – watching the reactions of the women as they leave the tomb – of Jesus as he sees them – and then their shared joy as the resurrection of the Lord becomes a reality.

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## **Tuesday 3 April**

Scripture: Acts 2: 36-41, Psalm 32/33, John 20: 11-18

*Supposing Jesus to be the gardener, she said to him, ‘Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’ She turned and said to him in Hebrew, ‘Rabbouni!’ (which means Teacher).’*

Yesterday, we had Jesus use the single word “Greetings” to make the reality of his resurrection known to the women who had been to the tomb to anoint him. Today, another single word marks it for another woman, Mary of Magdala – her name. In this case, it is clear there is no mix of fear and joy as with the women – Mary is filled with utter loss – totally bereft – until the calling of her name turns her life around and leads her to become apostle to the apostles – the bearer of the good news of the resurrection to Jesus’ other disciples.

* Why might Mary’s name have been just the right word for Jesus to use?
* When has someone spoken your name in a way that has been life-giving?

Many years ago, a woman was preparing for death – with considerable fear. When she heard this gospel, she decided to pray with it and came to an awareness that a similar moment to this awaited her… that when she died, Jesus would come to her and say her name too. Her fear did not disappear entirely – but as the end approached she found great comfort in the promise she had received. You might like to pray about this today… what will it be like to hear the Lord call your name as he welcomes you to new life?

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## **Wednesday 4 April**

Scripture: Acts 3: 1-10, Psalm 104/5, Luke 24: 13-35

*When Jesus was at the table with the disciples, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.*

Jesus seems to be specialising in very unostentatious ways of meeting his disciples in his risen life. Over the last couple of days, it has been a single word. Today, there have been a lot of words between the disciples on the road to Emmaus and Jesus – but the disciples have not recognised him. It is in the simple, everyday gesture of breaking bread that the disciples’ eyes and hearts are open… and Jesus disappears leaving the rest up to them!

* Why do you think Jesus’ gesture spoke when words had failed?
* What difference would it have made if, in response, the disciples had just stayed overnight and continued on their way rather than going back to Jerusalem?

Spend some time reflecting on the account of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Focus particularly on the scene inside the inn – and how the simple gesture transforms the lives of two people and renews hope and the desire to share what they have seen with others.

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## **Thursday 5 April**

Scripture: Acts 3: 11-26, Psalm 8, Luke 24: 35-48

*While the disciples were talking about recognising Jesus in the breaking of bread to the eleven remaining apostles and their companions, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost.*

We may feel a little like “at last” in today’s gospel. Having appeared to the women at the tomb, to Mary, to the disciples on the road to Emmaus – at last Jesus appears to those who were his closest companions. By now, they have heard the testimonies of all the others who have seen the risen Jesus and their reaction? Startled and terrified! One surprising thing about the gospels is that they do not air-brush out the embarrassing bits for the disciples… which, perhaps, makes them all the more credible.

* Does it help you to know that the apostles were not perfect?
* What might have stopped them believing the eye-witness accounts of those who had already told them about seeing and being with Jesus?

Reflect today on why the gospel accounts show the frailty of the apostles and disciples – and does not turn them into perfect disciples from the word “go”. Think about how this helps you – or troubles you. And what message is in there for you personally?

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## **Friday 6 April**

Scripture: Acts 4: 1-12, Psalm 117/8, John 21: 1-14

*Jesus said to them, ‘Come and have breakfast.’*

Today, we are back to Jesus using a very ordinary event to reinforce the reality of his resurrection. What is more surprising about this one is that the disciples have already spent time with the Risen Lord but this has not stopped them going back to their old employment. Jesus seems to give them space and time to come to terms with the change from being with him all the time to what his risen –and later, ascended life will mean for them. Today, that simple invitation, “Come and have breakfast” will mark a life-changing moment.

* Why might Jesus have let the disciples go back to their ordinary lives even after seeing him resurrected?
* What do you think it was like to be invited to breakfast by Jesus?

This chapter in John’s Gospel marks a significant spiritual “journey” for the disciples – and, especially, for Peter. It forms the basis of a book that the Bishops’ Conference Spirituality Committee prepared to explore Catholic spirituality called, “Do you love me?” The Department has copies of this available – it is great for individuals but can also be used in a small group. Think about using it as a companion guide through Easter-time – in the same way that many of us have a book we use in Lent.
Simply reply to this email with a request and we will get a copy to you, £5.00 incl P&P.

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##  **Saturday 7 April**

Scripture: Acts 4: 13-21, Psalm 117/8, Mark 16: 9-15

*But they did not believe her…*

*they did not believe them either…*

*…afterwards, Jesus himself sent out through them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.*

We do not actually hear the second part of our extract today – it comes the shorter ending of Mark’s gospel whereas we hear the longer version which cites the unbelief of the disciples and Jesus’ reproach of them. We include it here as it is very beautiful and speaks of Jesus’ own belief in those who are so unpromising in matters of faith. We know it worked because we are here – thousands of miles and years from the events of the gospel – brought to faith by the witness and faith of countless others. None of them was perfect – but the Spirit used them to spread the word of eternal salvation throughout the world.

* How do you think Jesus kept faith with people who were so weak in faith themselves?
* What does it say about Jesus’ faith in you?

Spend time today thinking about the trust God places in you – not because you are perfect or brave or even particularly brilliant in matters of faith. Pray for the grace to be used to spread the word about “the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation”. And remember, Jesus did not do it in dramatic ways – but in simple words and gestures which spoke to people’s hearts and helped to transform them. This we can also do…

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