

Easter

“Et valde mane una sabbatorum, veniunt ad monumentum, orto jam sole.”

How is your Latin? Mine is not that good. But Jesuits of my age, in our early years of training, had to speak Latin in the house except on holidays and during daily recreation periods. What we spoke was of course not classical Latin, and when we studied classical Latin later, even those of us with many years of Latin behind us found ourselves at sea. However, later on, when we studied in Latin scholastic philosophy, the kind of philosophy associated with Thomas Aquinas, we were quite at home.

And so, when I approach Easter, the Easter text that comes to my mind is in Latin, and it comes from Mark's Gospel (16:2). My memory is musical, however. The Gospel words I remember were the opening lines of an Easter hymn, and that is why and how I remember them. But when I look at the words themselves and try to understand them grammatically, I come up with this. *Valde* means very or exceedingly. *Mane* means early in the morning. *Una* means one, and *sabbatorum* is the genitive case of *Sabbata*, the Jewish Sabbath. So: “Very early on the morning of the Sabbath

they came to the tomb, the sun having just risen” (veniunt at monumentum, orto jam sole).”

In my memory all these words add up to one mood: freshness. It is early, very early, in the morning. The world is born anew once again. And yet when we are then told why the women are coming to the tomb, our sails go flat. All is not new. All is old. All is over. Jesus is dead, and these women, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome have bought spices and are coming to the tomb to anoint his body. They are wondering how they are going to get into the tomb, how they can remove the heavy stone barring entrance to it. And then all changes. They see that the stone has already been rolled back, and when they enter the tomb they see a young man there who tells them, “Do not be amazed! You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has been raised; he is not here.” And then they are given a job: they are to tell the disciples and Peter that Jesus will meet them in Galilee. But they are so frightened that they run from the tomb and don’t say a word to anyone.

Scriptures scholars tell us that originally Mark’s Gospel ended with this sentence describing the fear and silence of the three women. But we must then say to ourselves the following: either

they eventually told others about their experience, or others had similar experiences of the risen Jesus and were willing to talk about them. For, in one way or another, Jesus was preached as risen and the Christian community came into existence.

The situation in which we find ourselves today could lead us to adopt the position of the two Maries and Salome. We may be so frightened and discouraged by it that we may be tempted, like them, just to run away and say nothing. But if we do that, then the message of new life will no longer be preached. And so our prayer this Easter must be: “Lord, stir up our faith. Let us be strong in our faith in your new life. You are risen! And give us also the grace to believe that you promise us individually and as a race and as a planet new life. Let the freshness of the first Easter morning dawn in our hearts. Let us believe in life: your life, our life, and the life of our planet. Amen.