

# Rejoice and Be Glad

*Daily Reflections for Easter to Pentecost 2020*

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## Introduction

On the weekend I had planned to write the introduction to this book of reflections, I sat down with my laptop and nothing came out. I rarely find myself in the position of having nothing to say (just ask my family and friends). But on this day, it felt like a message. I wasn't ready. I needed more time to think, to pray, to reflect, and so I put the computer away.

That evening, Chiara, the youngest of my three children, returned home from an overnight at the New York State varsity gymnastics meet. When she set down her bag, I could see wilted branches wrapped in cellophane. I asked her what it was. She pulled out the sad bouquet and handed it to me, saying how they were pretty at the start of the day. Undeterred by their more-dead-than-alive appearance, I dug out a small vase, filled it with fresh water, trimmed off the bottoms of the stems, and set the maroon and white flowers on the counter. Both Chiara and my husband, Dennis, looked at me like I was a little crazy. The flowers were so completely drooped over it was the most pathetic flower arrangement I'd ever seen. And still, I insisted that a little water would revive them.

When I came downstairs the next morning, the flowers greeted me, looking as beautiful and alive as they must have when they were freshly cut. I smiled and turned to the review copy of a book I'd been asked to "blurb," not thinking much more about the flowers. As I read the very first meditation

in this yet-to-be-published manuscript about finding our spiritual teachers all around us, I read these words: “Ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you . . .” And I stopped short as if someone had just hit me in the head with a brick and turned around to look at the flowers again as if they might actually speak to me. That’s when I knew I’d been waiting for this moment to write this introduction.

Those flowers on my counter—and probably countless things dotting the counters and corners of your own life right now—are reminders that Easter is always all around us, even when we think there is no hope, even when we think all is lost. Jesus tells us today, this season, there is always reason to look forward in faith because he has defeated death for our sake and nothing can steal our salvation if we turn to God in trust and put one foot in front of the other on the journey of The Way day after day.

Jesus is the spiritual water that refreshes us, that takes our drooping spirits and revives us, that gives us new life when we think we can’t go on. Today is the first day of our Easter season, of the rest of our lives. Writing these reflections was truly a gift. Year after year, I focus on the readings of Lent (or Advent), but this journey allowed me to spend time on less-traveled paths through the daily details of the Acts of the Apostles and other Easter-season readings. I hope you, too, will find something new in these familiar stories, something that will pour fresh water on your soul and bring you back to life.

# Reflections

## **Rain or Shine**

**Readings:** Acts 10:34a, 37-43; Col 3:1-4 or 1 Cor 5:6b-8;  
John 20:1-9 or Matt 28:1-10

**Scripture:**

“He is not here, for he has been raised just as he said.” (Matt 28:6)

**Reflection:** Easter brings back powerful memories of my teen years, when I was a leader in our parish Catholic Youth Organization. Several years running, we planned a sunrise Easter Mass. We baked our own Communion bread (according to an official recipe, of course). We made felt banners (it was the late 70s, after all) and we planned and practiced music. And, inevitably, it would rain and Mass would end up in the small cinderblock chapel at our parish, which had no church building at the time. But that did nothing to dampen our Easter joy. We were so filled with the Spirit and so ready to sing “Alleluia” that rain and cold and concrete had no effect. Jesus had risen from the dead. How could we possibly be disappointed?

No matter where you find yourself today, whatever your problems and struggles, whatever your plans and responsibilities, there is reason to rejoice. Jesus is not dead; he is alive. The cross was not defeat for him, and it will not be defeat for us if we put our trust in him. We do not always under-

stand Jesus' ways. Like those early disciples, we may stare at the empty tomb—or at some other challenge in our own life—and wonder, “How can this be?” Jesus doesn't ask us to understand; he asks us to trust that things are unfolding just as he said.

**Meditation:** When you go to Mass today, pay attention to your physical surroundings—the Paschal candle flickering, the lilies with their powerful fragrance, the music bursting with Alleluias, the children in patent-leather shoes, the incense rising toward heaven, the holy water cold against your skin, a shower of blessings in the most literal sense. It's beautiful the way we use physical things to help us bridge the distance to God, as though we are so hungry to get closer, we pull out all the stops. If only we could keep that fire of love going year-round. The Church gives us a running start by offering us this beautiful fifty-day season of Easter. We might not wear Easter bonnets every week, but the water and candles, music and joy will be present in the liturgy. Soak it up. Let it feed your soul.

**Prayer:** Alleluia, Alleluia! He is risen! We sing out with joy, we bow down in gratitude, we rejoice in the resurrection.

## **Facing Fear**

**Readings:** Acts 2:14, 22-33; Matt 28:8-15

**Scripture:**

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went away quickly from the tomb, fearful yet overjoyed. (Matt 28:8)

**Reflection:** Fearful yet overjoyed. That could probably describe a lot of moments in our lives. For me, it conjures up powerful and precious memories of childbirth—the anticipation of wanting to meet my baby, coupled with the fear of labor. Still, after each of my three children were born, how quickly the fear faded from memory leaving only softness in its place. I imagine for the women at the tomb, the experience in today’s Gospel was much the same, as the fear of Good Friday, still so fresh in their minds, is replaced with the realization that He is risen. They did not know what to make of it, and yet they knew enough to run and spread the news.

Maybe that’s why Jesus appeared first to the women. Because he knew that those fearless enough to sacrifice everything to bring new life into the world were sure to be fearless in the face of the impossible. Rather than hide, the women rejoiced; rather than question, the women believed. How easy it would have been to brush aside their encounter as a figment of the imagination, grief pangs taken to the extreme.

But they chose the more difficult path: the path of truth, the Way of Jesus. And they were not content to keep it to themselves. They knew they had to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with all who would listen. Will we choose the same?

**Meditation:** Think of a time in your life when you felt both fear and joy. Was it a new job, a new child, a move to another city, a relationship that required risk? What made joy win out over fear? Now think of a time in your life when fear made you shrink back, left you paralyzed. What did you do to shake out of it? Where was God in the midst of it? Was God obviously present, or perhaps only visible in hindsight? Today, let go of any fear that is holding you back, and, like the women at the tomb, let the joy of Easter flood your heart and shake you out of your spiritual slumber.

**Prayer:** Risen Jesus, give us the courage to live with joy even when we are afraid, to know you are with us even when we feel alone, to take your message out into the world where it can heal, comfort, strengthen, save.

## **The Garden of Our Lives**

**Readings:** Acts 2:36-41; John 20:11-18

**Scripture:**

“Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” (John 20:15)

**Reflection:** I love the image of Jesus as gardener in today’s Gospel. Mary Magdalene, finding the tomb empty, is looking for her Master, unaware that he is right there in front of her, hidden in plain sight, until he speaks her name and her eyes are opened, there in a garden. What she thought was lost was there all the time. What she thought had been taken from her is suddenly so real that Jesus must tell her not to hold onto him. I have to admit that this is one of my favorite scenes in the Bible, maybe my most favorite. It’s the reading I really want to hear on Easter morning because to me it is the essence of the resurrection realization moment and a reminder that the first witness to Jesus’ glorified body was not one of the twelve but Mary of Magdala, the woman who would come to be known as the Apostle to the Apostles. The one who is the first to announce: “I have seen the Lord.”

What if Mary hadn’t happened down that path that day? What if, out of fear, she opted not to follow through with the burial rituals and responsibilities left to the women to handle? The apostles were hiding, afraid their faith might

mark them for the same violent end as their teacher. What if Mary had not been able to recognize her name when it was spoken by the Lord because she was distracted by fear or too timid to confront the gardener with her questions?

**Meditation:** Where are the gardens in your life, the places you've wandered in search of something important—purpose, love, faith, courage—and found only emptiness or what you thought was a void? You might connect that search with an actual physical location: the beach, a mountain, a chapel. Maybe it's an internal landscape where you seek meaning amid the chatter of your worried mind. Just be still for a moment. Enter into silence and listen. Where is the Lord calling you? Maybe he was right there all the time. Turn toward him, as Mary did, and face this beautiful truth.

**Prayer:** We are searching for you, Lord, in the busyness of our lives, the solitude of our struggles, the chaos of our world. Help us to hear your voice, to see your face there in the garden of our lives.