

# Rejoice and Be Glad

*Daily Reflections for Easter to Pentecost 2025*

Catherine Upchurch



LITURGICAL PRESS

Collegeville, Minnesota

[litpress.org](http://litpress.org)

*Nihil Obstat*: Rev. Robert C. Harren, J.C.L., *Censor Librorum*

*Imprimatur*: ✠ Most Rev. Patrick M. Neary, C.S.C., Bishop of St. Cloud, July 22, 2024

Cover design by Monica Bokinskie. Cover art courtesy of Getty Images.

Scripture excerpts in this work are from the *Lectionary for Mass for Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America, second typical edition* © 2001, 1998, 1997, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, DC. Used with permission. All rights reserved. No portion of this text may be reproduced by any means without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Other Scripture texts in this work are taken from the *New American Bible, revised edition* © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, DC, and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All Rights Reserved. No part of the New American Bible may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

© 2024 by Catherine Upchurch

Published by Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever, except brief quotations in reviews, without written permission of Liturgical Press, Saint John's Abbey, PO Box 7500, Collegeville, MN 56321-7500. Printed in the United States of America.

ISSN: 2578-7004 (Print)

ISSN: 2578-7012 (Online)

ISBN: 978-0-8146-6869-6

978-0-8146-6871-9 (e-book)

## Introduction

Just above the doorknob of my office, in a spot I noticed upon entering and leaving each day for thirty years, hung these words from Rabbi Abraham Heschel: *There are no proofs for the existence of God. There are only witnesses.*

Heschel's words were my reminder that the power of God's presence in our lives proclaims not only God's existence but God's very nature. Our lives become an invitation to others to encounter the God we know.

I find myself thinking of the resurrection of Jesus in a similar way. There are no firsthand accounts of the resurrection itself. We do not know if Jesus was lifted up by the hand of his Father or simply awoke on his own, if he unbound himself from the burial cloths or if angels did it for him. We do not know if the resurrection was a quiet event or if it shook the surrounding graves. But what we *do* know is what Jesus' followers witnessed: his bodily presence days after he died and was buried, his familiar voice, his compassion in feeding them as they came in from a long night of fishing, his familiar way of questioning them to aid in their understanding, his authority to send them out to share the Good News.

It is customary to refrain from singing or speaking "Alleluia" throughout the season of Lent. In some parishes the word itself, which literally means "Praise the Lord," is hidden or buried for the period of forty days, then dug up just prior to the Easter Vigil and proclaimed like a burst of joy after a season of self-examination and repentance. The

first generation of believers must have initially felt that their reason to praise God had been buried with Jesus, along with their expectations and hopes. Burying and unearthing the “Alleluia” is a symbolic gesture meant to help us, too, long for Good News and new life.

The Easter event and the entire fifty-day season of resurrection are a clarion call to give witness to what we have seen and heard and know to be true: that dying and death never have the last word.

Bring out the “Alleluia”!

Catherine Upchurch

# Reflections

## **Seeing Is Believing?**

**Readings:** Acts 10:34a, 37-43; Col 3:1-4 or 1 Cor 5:6b-8; John 20:1-9 or Luke 24:1-12

### **Scripture:**

Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed. (John 20:8)

**Reflection:** Have you ever raced to the hospital upon hearing that a family member is giving birth to a child? Or arrived early at a wedding to find a good seat where you know you will be able to see the faces of the bride and groom when they exchange vows? You would not doubt that the marriage or the birth took place if you heard the report from others, but there's something powerful—something both tangibly and intangibly powerful—about being a firsthand witness.

In John's account of the tomb of Jesus, Mary of Magdala is the first to see that something unexpected has happened: the stone covering the entrance to the tomb has been moved. She runs to Simon Peter and the "disciple whom Jesus loved," who both run to the site to see for themselves. All this activity in the early morning hours reveals three things: an empty tomb, burial cloths tossed aside, and the rolled-up cloth that had covered Jesus' head.

We have a saying that "Seeing is believing," but whether that saying is true depends on the seer. A Roman official or

a visiting tourist who knows nothing of the man who had been buried there might decide these items are signs of desecration or grave robbery. But the followers of Jesus see something very different. They see proof of life! They have been shaped by their time in the presence of Jesus, by his words and deeds, and by the seeds of hope he has planted in them. Having witnessed what he was all about in life, they have no doubt that he is able to upend death. They see, and they believe. Now they must bear witness.

**Meditation:** In the Acts of the Apostles, Peter says on behalf of the disciples, “We are witnesses of all that he did” (10:39). What Jesus did invites his followers to see who he is and to proclaim it in their actions. Their post-resurrection ministry of healing and teaching in his name introduces Jesus to people who never saw him. How can our lives reflect what Jesus did? Will others know who Jesus is because of us?

**Prayer:** O Lord of the empty tomb, give us eyes to see you even when all seems lost. Make us witnesses to the power of life over death.

## **Fearful Yet Overjoyed**

**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. . . . Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.” (Matt 28:8, 10)

**Reflection:** The women’s response to the angel’s message that Jesus has been raised sounds perfectly reasonable to me. Who wouldn’t be frightened to see the tomb empty and talk with angels? Who wouldn’t also be overjoyed to imagine Jesus is alive, raised from death?

We know from our own experiences that fear and joy can exist within us as companions: becoming parents for the first time, being promoted with added responsibilities, having skills tested on a great adventure, and even facing death after a long and depleting illness. God knows the human heart and gives us the wisdom to hold both realities, fear and joy, until they can become courage.

The risen Jesus seems to know that his followers will need such courage to move forward, and so he asks them to meet him in Galilee. This is the place where they first found the courage to leave their places of comfort and follow a man whose message embodied all they desired. There the dis-



ciples (along with women followers, I'm sure) will be reminded of their call to follow Jesus. And there in Galilee, where they first encountered Jesus, they will see the risen Lord for themselves. There, they will be given the courage to proclaim what they know to be true: Jesus has conquered death—not only for himself, but for all of us.

**Meditation:** Where would you return to rediscover the start of your journey with Jesus? The neighborhood or parish of your youth? The location of a meaningful high school retreat? The college where you wrestled with whether to believe at all? The hospital where a serious illness threatened your life or the life of someone you love? There is nothing magical about these locations themselves, but there is something deeply affirming and challenging about meeting Jesus again, as for the first time.

**Prayer:** O Lord of the empty tomb, transform our fears and joys into the courage to proclaim your victory over death.