

## Homily for Easter Tuesday 2024

My brothers and sisters in Christ,

As you know from the Newsletters, this is the second of five Cluster Masses this week and the first to be held in St Margaret Mary. I hope that those of you who heard me preach in Christ the King yesterday will forgive me if I repeat my few words of introduction.

For those who do not know me, I am Gary O'Brien, one of the Parish Deacons in Christ the King and Our Lady of the Assumption, Maryvale. I am also the Clergy Coordinator of the Cluster. So it will hardly surprise you if in this homily I point out some important parallels between what we read in our Scripture today and our Cluster development. Just briefly to remind you of a crucial point I made when I preached before Lent: the direction of travel for that development is the merger of the current three parishes in the Cluster into one single canonical parish, albeit with three places of worship.

Against that background I want to focus on three aspects of today's readings:

- The focus on repentance in our First Reading;
- The focus on Mary of Magdala in the Gospel; and
- The symbolism of Mary turning round but seeing the Lord without recognising him until our Lord calls her by name.

So: repentance! At first sight, it might seem rather odd to be talking about repentance in the Easter Octave. Is repentance the special theme of Lent and Good Friday? Well yes and no. This is my stole from Christ the King. You will

see that it is reversible: purple on one side and white on the other. Why? Because, there can be no growth in holiness without repentance and there can be no repentance unless we listen to the voice of God stirring in our conscience. And isn't listening to God something we who by baptism have been made temples of the Holy Spirit should be doing rather a lot? This, my friends, is precisely what is laid before us in the First Reading. Those listening to St Peter first had to be cut to the heart and repent of the fact that their sins had led Jesus to the Cross – as indeed have ours. But having been cut to the heart and repented they were baptised in huge numbers. In other words, having realised that they had fallen short of the glory of God, they recognised their need for Jesus and became part of the community of the redeemed.

What lesson is there for us today in all of this? It will help if we recall that the Greek for repentance is *metanoia* which literally means turning around to face a new direction. In doing so, we leave behind whatever is holding us back in our spiritual development. In considering how to face the challenges of the next few years, we must have the courage to acknowledge that we have no choice but to turn around and move in a different direction but nevertheless to exactly the same goal: becoming ever more fully the community of the redeemed. This is a moment of opportunity not a moment of crisis. We have already received the gift of the Holy Spirit in baptism and confirmation. We are fed by the Body and Blood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. How much more spiritual energy

do we need before we can say with our Psalmist and without reservation: the word of the Lord is faithful and all his works to be trusted? Let those words ring in our ears as we joyfully embrace our future mission as the Newman Cluster.

Speaking of future mission brings me to the focus on Mary of Magdala in today's Gospel. This episode is given to us only in the Gospel of St John. Yesterday's Gospel reading began in the immediate aftermath of the discovery of the empty tomb. "The women" following their encounter with the angels run to fetch the disciples. A few verses before the one which opened yesterday's text, Matthew has identified "the women" as "Mary of Magdala and the other Mary". So this scene in the garden is taking place after the discovery of the empty tomb and before the women fetch Peter and John. Now the women had to fetch two men because only the evidence of two men was regarded as capable of proving anything. The evidence of women had no value whatsoever. Yet now, thanks to the guidance of Pope Francis, we regard Mary of Magdala as the Apostle to the Apostles and celebrate her as such on her newly upgraded Feast Day: 22<sup>nd</sup> July.

We all need to become Apostles as Mary of Magdala did. It will be a pious impulse, as we approach our Cluster meetings in the summer, to invoke the intercession of Mary of Magdala for a fruitful set of discussions.

She has yet more to teach us about becoming an apostle. St John records that Mary turned and saw Jesus but did not recognise him until he called her by name. Now the Greek word for "turned

around" here in St John's Gospel is not related to *metanoia* and repentance as used by St Luke in Acts. Rather it has the sense of changing inwardly for the better. Mary of Magdala had not done anything wrong requiring repentance but she did have to grow in discipleship – as must we.

So to grow into our mission of being Apostles for Christ we have to change inwardly for the better. And what might that involve? Well, for a start it may involve remembering that Christ has called us by name not once but twice – first when we were baptised in a name our parents chose and secondly when we were confirmed in a name we chose for ourselves. On both occasions we were anointed as priests, prophets and kings.

We will all have to spend a lot more time reflecting on what it means when the Church teaches that by baptism and confirmation we receive all the graces necessary to live out our baptismal vocation to be a priest, a prophet and a king.

I shall say more about that on 16<sup>th</sup> April in the first of our Cluster Catechesis sessions here at St Margaret Mary. For now let me conclude by saying that only by accepting our call and living out our baptismal vocation and responding to Jesus as Master can any of us hope to be true to the mission with which every single one of us has been entrusted.