Columns
Horizons
Spirituality



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When Mary Magdalene goes to Jesus' tomb and finds it empty, she seems to panic (John 20:11-18). Where is her beloved friend? "*What have you done with him?*," she asks the person she sees there. If we stay here with Mary as she weeps, can we relate? Do we feel the pang of loss that she knows at that moment? The disorientation of losing a friend, someone who gives you a sense of direction, hope and belonging?

Remember how they met — she was cured of the demons possessing her. Jesus healed her, bringing her new life and a return to her place in the community. And now, that source of life seems to be taken from her, first by death, and then even by the impossibility of the consoling practices of burial.

Every year, when we celebrate the passion and resurrection of Jesus, it hits me in a different way. Sorrow shifts and changes color depending on what I've experienced in the past year and throughout my lifetime. This year, I feel, deeply, a rift in an important personal relationship — perhaps an extension of Mary Magdalene's momentary mourning for Jesus. I feel the uncertainty of our country, when things we used to count on seem to be upended. I feel the precarity people around me experience, even more present to me living on the border with Mexico, while I have the unearned privilege of security. I feel the uncertainty of the future of religious life, both the shrinking we are experiencing and the energy and potential that are enabled by such changes.

One of the gifts of Holy Week and Easter is the opportunity to experience the universal feelings of sorrow and joy together as a community. Together, we bear witness to the Passion narrative — our innocent, peaceful leader put on trial and killed. We experience the mystery of human behavior by playing the part of the crowd on Palm Sunday, shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" We bring our sins and our sorrows to the cross on Good Friday, recalling that no matter what we've ever done for good or bad, the cross bears the great love of our Lord. And then we share with Mary the mystery of profound sorrow transformed by the love of God into the joy of new life. The mystery of evil is totally overcome by the mystery of God's love. What a gift we have to celebrate with the Easter season — no wonder we dwell on it for 50 days!

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Mary Magdalene's sorrow turns to bewildered joy when Jesus says her name. She recognizes in his voice that he is not the gardener as she first thought, but her *rabboni*, her teacher and her guide. As I sit with her sorrow-turned-joy, I think of the people I love, who could call me back to myself just by saying my name.

Just as with sorrow, my experience of joy changes as I get older. Now those voices and faces of my loved ones include people who've been called from this world and people whose circles no longer intertwine with mine — relationships that have ended for a variety of reasons, leaving in my heart a little space of joy mixed with sadness. It's the blessing of having known that person mixed with the grief of loss. A space that helps me relate to Mary in the garden, between her tears and her recognition of Jesus disguised as a gardener.

As tempting as it might be to focus entirely on the joy and good news of the Easter season, it is more human to always keep Holy Week on our minds, too. Yes, we rejoice, and we remember the sorrows and the grief. We have lived through troubling times, including the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic, the crisis of global migration due to violence and climate change, and the crisis of polarization that pulls apart our families and communities. The joy of Easter doesn't diminish the reality of these experiences.

At the same time, we in the northern hemisphere experience new life on a radical scale. Springtime brings blooming flowers, greening landscapes and wildlife in proliferation. The fertility of all of God's creation is on display, bringing us beauty and plenty. This, too, is reality.

The mystery of our faith requires us to *remember*. We remember the events of Holy Week and Easter yearly during this beautiful season, and also weekly or daily every time we participate in the Eucharist. So, too, we remember all of the personal sorrows and joys that shaped us into the people we are. These, too, are precious gifts that we hold close during this season and always. With Mary Magdalene, let us wipe the weeping from our faces and share the good news of God's love with those we meet.