+ Maria

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ and Our Lady of Mount Carmel –

Easter morning, fresh and bright. This is a day that can evoke memories in all of us. Getting ready for Church, anticipation of Easter baskets or other treats according to our family’s culture and customs; new clothes, in those days for many people (a custom most certainly gone in the U.S. and not possible in poorer places); visiting relatives, a festive meal, flowers and sun. For children, the promise of candy and for adults connecting with family. These are the memories of Easter. I can tell you that for many people, Easter has remained a Church day, even for occasional visitors. Priests often remark about this and I think, personally, it is a day of Good News, triumph and victory in our God, in Jesus, and people want to hear this and be strengthened by it. The message that Christ is alive and victorious over the power of death and sin comforts and helps people – if only they could successfully translate that into daily living, and allow the Lord a greater share in their ordinary lives.

Easter hinges on faith. You believe, or you do not. We see the response of faith in its complexity even in those most closely associated with Jesus. We can empathize with Mary Magdalene this morning, and with her, those other beautiful women Joanna, and Mary the mother of James in last night’s gospel. We know that feeling, we who profess publically to live in allegiance to Jesus Christ with a pure heart and a good conscience, we can understand the challenges of living our faith, of believing that God is in what is going on, that the Lord is part of our ageing, or illness, or work or headaches. Understanding the resurrection is only possible by believing and through believing the door is open to us. Our society and our neighbors have lost God. They have been misinformed, or, sadly, not formed at all in the ways of faith, and forty-five minutes in Church a week, or one hour in CCD class, cannot match up to ten hours a day on social media or in educational systems that have an anti-religion bias. But we love our neighbors, and cannot tire of finding ways to witness, like the gospel women, to the truth of the resurrection of Our Lord and His ongoing presence.

When I read the scriptures for today, one line drew my attention. Mary Magdalene runs to Peter and the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them: “They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don’t know where they put him.” This sentence can be read on two levels, can’t it? Level One: Mary Magdalene is reporting what she knows and has seen to Peter and John. They run and verify her facts, they saw and they believed. Only in the following verses not read this morning, is the reality of the resurrection made clear to them and they themselves see the Risen One.

But there is a second reading possible here, we might call it the existential one, meaning the “here and now” reading of a believer in 2022. The Lord is risen from the tomb, no longer dead. I believe. But “we don’t know where they put him” – that is another question, the ongoing faith question, the feeling we can only have of wondering just where the Lord is today, in the midst of all we face, of the problems that belong to us in this generation and time. Where is the Risen One? Where is the Lord?

Asking this question is not a sign of weak faith, but growing faith, always searching for the face “of the one whom we love”, the one to whom we have professed our entire life, our fruitfulness, our dependence, our wills. As Carmelites, we are called to be masters at discerning the presence of God, the Risen One, in day-to-day life. We ask “I don’t know where they put him” not because we’re hopelessly lost or confused, but because we believe and know that if we continue to walk in faith, no matter what, both in the light and in the dark, we will find Jesus anew. He will lead me always to a new and better place. That place will always be a blessed place, and I will try and embrace it with love for him, my neighbor and myself. You and I were never promised a life more charmed and magical than Christ’s life. We were only promised that in dying with him, we would rise with him. Sometimes, we must admit, “we don’t where we put ourselves, much less Christ!” And we have to laugh. The Risen Lord is always able to be found, and in prayer and discerning, open listening and paying attention around us, we will find him.

Christ is risen. He truly is. Alleluia!

Father Mario, O.Carm.

Avila-On-Hudson

April 17, 2022