

There's a story told of a rabbi in ancient times who gathered his students together very early one morning, while it was still dark. He put this question to them. "How can you tell when night has ended and the day has begun?" One student made a suggestion. "Could it be when you can see an animal and you can tell whether it is a sheep or a goat?" "No, that's not it," answered the rabbi. Another student said, "Could it be when you look at a tree in the distance and you can tell whether it is a fig tree or a peach tree?" Again the rabbi answered, "No, that's not it, either." After a few more guesses the students said, "Well, how *can* you tell when night has ended?"

The rabbi answered, "It's when you look on the face of any man or woman and you see them as your brother or sister. If you can't do that, then, no matter what time it is, it's still night." The students had taken the question in a physical sense. The rabbi led them to see the question in a deeper sense. For him, night was a symbol of that blindness that can stop us seeing other people properly. By contrast, the day was a symbol of that vision by which we can see each person as a brother or sister.

The gospel passage that we heard a few moments ago began with these words. "After the Sabbath, and towards dawn on the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala and the other Mary went to visit the tomb." It was not yet dawn. It was still dark when they went to visit the tomb where Jesus had been buried. As the story unfolds, darkness gives way to light, not only in a physical sense, but in a deeper sense as well.

There's a violent earthquake and the angel of the Lord comes down from heaven. His face is like lightning, his robe white as snow. The angel knows that the women are looking for Jesus. The angel announces the good news that Jesus has risen from the dead. The women are filled with awe and great joy and they come quickly away from the tomb, intending to share the good news with the other disciples. Then, coming to meet them, they see Jesus. From the darkness before dawn, they have moved into the light of a new day. At first they see the brilliant light of the angel. Then they see the light of Christ himself, risen from the dead. The night is over. The day is at hand.

Mary of Magdala and the other Mary are models for *us*. We'll be in the dark until we hear in our heart the good news that Jesus is risen from the dead and until we recognise Jesus in faith. When we hear this good news in a personal way and when we recognise Jesus in faith, then the night is over and the day has dawned.

The Scriptures also teach us that recognising Jesus implies recognising others as Jesus did – as brothers and sisters – and treating them with kindness. To the extent that we fail in this, we're still living in darkness. As we read in the First Letter of John, "Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother or sister is still in the dark." (1 John 2:9)

Easter invites us to acknowledge Jesus as our Lord and Teacher. Easter also invites us to recognise each person we meet as a brother or sister and treat them with kindness. If we can do that, the night is really over and the day has truly begun.

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