

From the book: *My Yoke Is Sweet*
Materials for meditation on the Spiritual Life.
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Chapter XII
THE RISEN JESUS UNCHANGED IN KINDNESS

Introduction: The Easter Apparitions

We meditate on Our Lord's suffering life that we may learn how to bear the cross, how to serve God in darkness, how to seek strength in the memory of the sufferings and cross of Christ, but especially that we may learn to know the Lord Jesus better. We shall now meditate on His risen life that we may further encourage ourselves by its lessons and that we may deepen our knowledge of Our Lord's goodness.

The risen life fills us with joy; it teaches us to look forward with confidence—sufferings will pass for us as they passed for Jesus—if manifests to us the adorable character of Our Saviour, so kind, so considerate, so lovable.

Among the apparitions of the Lord Jesus after the Resurrection, we shall select three for our meditation

1. The apparition to the Holy Women. (St. Matt.)
2. The apparition to St. Mary Magdalen. (St. John.)
3. The apparition on the way to Emmaus. (St. Luke.)

We all need to realize in a very clear way that God is good and merciful and lovable; that God made Man has human kindness and compassion and sympathy; and further that all this goodness which makes the Lord Jesus so lovable, is not directed to a chosen few only, but is directed to us all. No matter what our past sins or our present defects may be, if only we turn to the Lord Jesus we shall find Him already turned to us; turned to us with all the knowledge He has of the intimacies of our souls, and with all the sympathy and helpfulness that characterized Him while He walked visibly on this earth: "Jesus Christ yesterday, to-day and the same for ever."

To believe all these truths with a firm and lively faith is one of the secrets of sanctity.

Now the apparitions we are about to consider show forth this goodness by the considerate and charming, manner of the Lord towards those to whom He appeared: He adapted Himself to the needs of each, He treated each in the way that would appeal best to their personal temperament and dispositions. The revelations teach us a lesson in fraternal charity; they attract us to want Jesus, to want to be united to Him, to want to surrender ourselves to Him—doing His will in all and bearing the cross He wills us to bear.

I.
THE HOLY WOMEN
"All hail, fear not"

The holy women who were so devoted to Jesus during the years of His ministry form the first type we shall contemplate.

The Scripture tells us that when the Sabbath was passed (Saturday evening) these holy women began their preparations to go to the tomb of Jesus.

What had been their conversation during the Sabbath? The Lord Jesus occupied their thoughts wholly; they spoke of Him, recalled memories of Him; they were full of desire to manifest their devotion even after His apparent failure. During the evening they got ready the fragrant spices and the linen; they worked into the night, for they were to start before the dawn so as to reach the tomb as early as possible.

How pleasing to Jesus was this reverence for His dead body, His sacred body. During His life they had ministered to Him; they come again to repeat this even in death.

Anticipating the dawn the holy women started while it was yet dark. As they were approaching the garden, the moment came in which Jesus fulfilled His promise of rising on the third day. His glorious body, all-perfect but still keeping the five wounds, passed through the rocky tomb.

But the tomb was not to remain closed. Suddenly the earth was shaken as on Calvary. An angel descended, rolled back the stone and sat upon it (St. Matthew); his face was like the lightning and his garments white as snow. The guards at the tomb, struck with terror, fled to the city.

There is nothing in the Gospel to indicate that the holy women felt the shock of the earthquake. But even if they did their devotion to Jesus gave them courage: they continued their way and entered the garden. In the dim light of the dawn they saw that the stone was rolled away from the tomb—the Scripture says that it was very large and hence they could see it from a distance in spite of the obscurity.

Their simple and trusting love was now to receive its first reward—the news of the Resurrection. It was the angel at the tomb who spoke the astounding words: “Fear not, ye seek Jesus Who was crucified, He is not here for He is risen as He said. . . . And going quickly tell His disciples that He is risen.”

“And they went out quickly from the sepulcher with fear and great joy, running to tell His disciples. And behold Jesus met them.”

It was indeed the Lord Jesus Who stood before them. What a moment of joy for these holy souls; He was on the garden path, and He was just as they had so recently seen Him.

“All hail,” He said, “fear not.” How often had He not used these words?

They fell down before Him and took hold of His feet, as St. Matthew expressly tells us, meaning that they kissed His feet. Jesus let them enjoy His presence for a short time, and then He sent them to tell His apostles—He repeated the orders of His angel.

The angel had promised the women in Our Lord’s name that they would see Him in Galilee. But God always gives more than is expected and Jesus anticipated the time, of manifestation just to satisfy their desire to see Him.

What most strikes us about the holy women is their *simplicity and confidence* and their utter unselfishness.

They thought all was over. Yet they do not rest to pity themselves in loneliness. True love of Jesus leaves no room for self-pity. This love was in their hearts—in spite of the gloom of Friday. They would go to the tomb. They must give the dead Lord the last token of their affection.

They had so many reasons for staying at home: the hatred of the Jews for the friends of Jesus; the anger of the guards at the tomb; the difficulty of rolling away the stone; but they went all the same—out into the darkness. Their simple confidence enabled them to face all these obstacles—they forgot themselves and their weakness.

This confidence was most pleasing to the Lord Jesus. How He watched each act; how He noted the impulse of their hearts turned to Him; how He followed each word they spoke! Hence He would not wait for Galilee, or even to see Peter, but hastened to fill these simple hearts with the joy of the Resurrection. He gave them a privilege the memory of which would keep them united to Him for ever.

Application: The love of the Lord for those that are simple appears in this episode—it reminds us of His love for children. To be simple means to be single-minded, to consider only God and what He wishes, therefore being simple implies being unselfish. Souls that are not sharp in seeing to their own interests are easily very pleasing to God. “With the simple is His conversation,” says the Scripture. Souls that are too astute, those that are too far-seeing in matters of personal interest, put a great obstacle to their union with God. We must be simple with God.

If we are simple, straight and confident, Jesus will manifest Himself to us in the manner most suited to our souls. We may have to wait, to persevere, to show courage and trust. But in His own good time His infinite love will bring Him down to us. He will give us moments of great joy to be succeeded by the ineffable privilege of making Him known to others. He will say to us as to the holy women: “Go and tell

My brethren about Me.” Go and tell those dear to Me of My concern for them tell them about Me by the holiness of your life at least.

II ST. MARY MAGDALEN

“*Whom seekest thou?*”

The apparition to the holy women tells us of the love of Jesus for those that are simple and confident. It is a picture of His loving kindness.

Before that apparition He had already appeared to another woman—to St. Mary Magdalen, who had been a sinner. This apparition is calculated to move all hearts profoundly. It tells us of the special love of Jesus for the repentant sinner — we are sinners.

Devotion to the sacred feet of Jesus was the great characteristic of St. Mary Magdalen. She had washed them with her tears and dried them with her hair and poured her fragrant perfume over them and received her pardon as she lay beside them; at the sacred feet she had rested in the home of Bethany and heard the Master saying: “Mary has chosen the better part.” She had venerated them in life and now in death her love could not be satisfied. The devotion and work of Friday evening were not enough. The Gospel tells us of her coming in the morning to the sepulcher, of her giving the news to the apostles and remaining weeping at the tomb when the Apostles returned home. She wept thinking of the Passion, and again because she was separated from her Lord.

The Angels appeared and asked her

“Woman, why weepest thou?” She answered:

“Because they have taken away my Lord.”

And then the Lord Himself came and stood beside her.

You know the beautiful story.

She thought He was the gardener. Her mind and eye were so full of the wounded body that she did not recognize Him—or were her eyes held so as not to recognize?

And He said: “Woman, why weepest thou?”

Jesus seemed to linger upon her love and her grief; it was such a joy for Him to see how that love and grief were opening the soul of His beloved penitent to further grace; He loved to hear her repeat those acts of love, and hence we hear Him repeating the question of the Angels. “Whom seekest thou?” He said, as if Mary could seek anyone but Jesus.

She said to Him:

Sir, if you have taken Him tell me where you have laid Him.”

To Mary there is only one “Him” in the world—one love.

Others are troubled about many things— One only is necessary. She thought that the gardener had removed the body elsewhere for some reason, and in her love she forgets her lack of strength and offers herself to take away the body: “I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me.”

Jesus said one word: “Mary!” —one word in His own voice; it was as His one look to St. Peter.

“My Master!” she said, and fell at His feet. It was her old place; it was there she had received her pardon.

The Lord let her satisfy her devotion and then : “Do not cling to Me,” He said, “I am not ascended to My Father”; you will have frequent opportunities of seeing Me, and later on in heaven you will enjoy My presence, but now go on an errand of charity. “Go, tell My brethren and say to them: I ascend to My Father and to your Father, to My God and to your God.”

Application: The contemplation of the apparition to St. Mary Magdalen is a great source of *tenderness* in our devotion to Jesus.

When we compare it with the apparition to the holy women we must admire how the loving Master treats each soul in the manner suited to each.

To the simple He comes directly and meets them in the garden walk. He is simple with them.

To the ardent lover He comes first, and the finely sensitive delicacy of her devotion to Him leads Him to come in a way that will manifest the particular tenderness of His love.

And what a revelation all this is of Himself, of His kindness, of His thoughtfulness, of His concern for the interests of His children! But we must ponder on these details if we are to enter into the knowledge of His goodness.

III

EMMAUS

“Stay with us for evening approaches”

Supper at Emmaus

Let us now consider how the Lord Jesus manifested Himself to those who, although they loved Him, were slow to believe and who had to be instructed and prepared for His manifestation.

Two of the disciples in the afternoon of Easter Day had gone walking to the hamlet of Emmaus. They spoke together of the Master, and He, in the guise of a stranger, came to them and walked with them and explained the Scripture to them until their hearts were burning within them; and when they were at table He revealed Himself in the breaking of bread.

Consider the character of these two disciples. They had seen the miracles of Jesus and had believed in Him, but Calvary had been too much for them; they had hoped Jesus would redeem Israel, as they said, but this hope was extinguished in the Blood of the Passion; and so overwhelming had been the shock of the apparent failure, of the shame, of the weakness, of the cruel agony, of the hasty burial, that they forgot the oft-repeated promise of the Resurrection; not even the evidence of the holy women, who came and told them of what had taken place, of the empty tomb and of the vision of angels, not even this was able to shake off the impression of the failure of Good Friday.

Before meeting the Lord Jesus the two disciples were engaged in conversation about Him. In spite of their disappointment, in spite of the absence of hope, “they talked together of all those things which had happened,” as St. Luke records: “they talked and reasoned with themselves,” to quote his further words.

To think and talk and reason about Jesus is so pleasing to Him that He always comes near and joins those who do so. He desires us to think of Him; He instituted the Blessed Sacrament that He might be remembered. The wicked one has for motto: “Let His name be remembered no more,” and he fills our mind and memory with trifles to make us forget Jesus. He lures man to worldly pursuits and pleasures so that Jesus is ignored; he tempts man to try to achieve himself in the material world, without any reference to his loving Creator and Redeemer. We must think frequently of Jesus and we must speak frequently of Jesus. To do so is to manifest love and to get the special reward of being able to, speak easily *to* Jesus. “Where thy treasure is there will be thy heart” —thy thoughts. And “from the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” When the Holy Ghost came on the apostles they spoke the wonderful things of God. The words and the acts and the thoughts of the Lord Jesus are indeed the wonderful things of God.

The Lord Jesus desired to manifest Himself to these two. He loved them in spite of their incredulity; and, in His love, He came to prepare them for this grace. He joined them in the guise of a stranger.

How different is this apparition from that to the holy women! All were dear to Him, yet treated differently. He gave the holy women a few moments. He gave these two who needed instruction a great part of the afternoon on this most remarkable of days. He had time for them when they needed it.

Let us picture to our minds this Gospel scene. The hidden Lord accosted them:

What are the words ye speak and are sad? Then He listened to their story with patience. The two disciples revealed their minds by what they said.

Contemplate Jesus listening but not recognized. It was similar to His meeting St. Mary Magdalen and yet it was very different.

When the disciples had told Him all the details about Himself, He spoke: “O foolish and slow of heart to believe in all things which the prophets have spoken!

The reproach of Jesus was gentle: it was deserved.

And then He spoke of suffering: “Ought not Christ to have suffered these things and so to enter His glory?” Ought not the Messias to suffer all that the prophets had foretold of Him? And the fulfillment of the prophecy, does it not prove that Jesus of Whom ye speak was indeed the Messias promised?

And then He gradually brought them through the Scriptures that were full of words about Himself and His Passion: “Beginning at Moses and all the Prophets He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things that were concerning Him.” With adorable patience and kindness He was preparing their hearts for the revelation of Himself. He had taken them just as they were with their resistance to the evidence of the holy women, and had led them by the argument of the Scripture until their hearts, their whole being, were His again.

The two disciples were docile to the instructions of their Lord. They did not realize what was going on in their souls, but later, when they looked back, they realized it and said one to another: “And was not our heart burning within us whilst He spoke in the way and opened to us the Scriptures?”

There is no joy like the joy God gives to those that are docile to His grace. It is the peace of God that surpasseth all understanding. Satan tries to persuade us to seek our consolations in creatures only and to neglect God. It is folly to do so. He that made all creatures contains all their excellence. Hence our true consolation is in Him.

The labours of the Lord Jesus were not fruitless: the hearts of the two disciples were glowing. The unknown stranger had spoken of their Lord most wonderfully and had opened the Scriptures to them.

Petition was the fruit of this movement in their hearts: they constrained Him to stay with them when He seemed to be passing on; they wished to be in His company; they besought Him, “stay with us,” they said.

How pleasing to Jesus was this grateful instancy of invitation—the effect of His own words. What a misfortune if they had let Him pass on—if the moment of grace had been missed. But they did not miss it; they pressed Him, they constrained Him to stay.

The Lord yielded to their desire and entered the house with them; He would now reward their holy violence. As He sat at the table the scene of Holy Thursday was repeated:

He took bread and blessed and brake and gave to them.”

It was over in a moment.

The Lord had rewarded these now docile hearts with the gift of Himself: “And their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished out of their sight.”

They had yielded to His sweet influence and He gave them nothing less than the gift of Himself. “They knew Him,” not by human recognition only but by the deep knowledge of Faith and the intimacy of Holy Communion.

Application The details of this apparition should give us very sweet *confidence*. Christ is risen, He is always near us as He was near the disciples; He is always condescending to our weakness.

The story of this apparition is like the story of our life in the past and in the future, for it is a series of manifestations of the goodness of God.

We may not be conscious of the nearness of Our Divine Master, but we should be ever confident that He is near us, and that our soul will be treated by Him in the way most suited to her needs.

Our constant prayer to Him should be:

“Mane nobiscum Domine quoniam advesperascit.”

“Remain with us, O Lord, for evening is approaching.”

The Church prays thus in the vespers of Paschal time. This prayer corresponds to the words, “Do not permit me to be separated from Thee,” which the priest says before Holy Communion. The Saints ever prayed so. St. Ignatius asks in the *Anima Christi*: “Never permit me to be separated from Thee.” We also must pray in like manner. Our confidence while repeating this prayer rests on His desire to be with us—even us, and on His certain power to draw us to Himself so that we may share His life more and more perfectly.

The knowledge of our necessities should make us repeat the same prayer; we can express our need in the same words as the disciples—it is growing dark. We may foresee trials; clouds, and dark ones, may be on the horizon, clouds on mind and body—truly it is growing dark—” Stay with us, O Lord.” Our life will be made up of days of light and nights of darkness. Evening approaches; life will close perhaps soon—*Mane nobiscum Domine*: stay with us, O Lord.

IV APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

What a great lesson we can learn from these three apparitions! A lesson in the knowledge of God made Man.

The Lord Jesus treats souls so differently, each in the way best suited to it : (a) with the simple women He is simple; (b) with the affectionate, finely sensitive Magdalen He is more familiar in His expression of delicate tenderness; c) with the incredulous disciples He is patient : He explains, He instructs, until He makes their hearts burn.

Although these souls were so different, *they all agreed* in their devotion to Himself; they all wanted Him. They all appreciated His friendship, they were willing, they were desirous with all their strength to do anything Jesus might ask. We all should agree in this, no matter how we differ in temperament or talents or past history; and then all of us can count on the special kindness of Jesus, all of us are dear to Him; to all He is good; in all He does He is admirable, He is lovable.

Our Lord teaches us by these incidents that, *provided we really want Him*, we should have confidence in Him and in His treatment of our soul. He deals with each one of us according to our individual needs. His plan for our sanctification is the best. And so we must not make the mistake of thinking that we would be holier under a different set of circumstances. We must therefore *have trust in the arrangements of His Providence*. It is He that is presenting Himself to us amid the events of every day. And our faith in thus seeing Him in the incidents and circumstances of our existence will be richly rewarded since He has assured us “Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.”

There are few sincere Catholics who are not afflicted, now and then in life, by the idea that somehow sanctity does not seem a practical possibility for them. They see others showing signs of love for God in spite of defects. But they themselves seem to be somehow out of it all. A certain fundamental perversity or defect of their nature keeps them back.

Some are conscious that they have no great ability. They say the lectures they hear and the books they read are too deep for them. Let them think of the holy women, their simplicity, their devotion, their courage and how the Lord Jesus so favoured them.

Others are keenly aware that they are highly strung, that they are impulsive and emotional. Let them think of the ardent Mary Magdalen who, in spite of her sins, became a great lover and how the Lord Jesus treated her just in the way that would appeal to her; how He accommodated Himself to her character.

Others again are faced with the fact of spiritual coldness, of a certain hardness and resistance or at least indifference to spiritual things; they seem to be wanting in real fundamental holiness. Let them think of the hard-headed disciples on the way to Emmaus and how foolish and slow of heart they were. And how the Lord Jesus spent His afternoon with them and reasoned and argued from Holy Scripture in all patience

until He had convinced their minds, and how He made their hearts to burn within them, and how He won them completely by giving Himself to them.

We have each of us been called by the Lord Jesus in a particular way. We must not judge His treatment of others. They are called by Jesus along a different path; He treats them differently; each one is very dear to Him. We must not wish for the treatment He gives to another. We should avoid comparing our gifts with those of others. We must be full of gratitude for what He has done for each of us—we can never fathom His goodness in our case. In His service we can try sincerely, with all our limitations, to do His will and to carry the daily cross. If we do this He will condescend to our perverse character and manifest Himself to us.

The whole history of the apparitions is a revelation of the charity of Jesus—we also should strive to be all things to all men. It is a revelation of the created love of Jesus for men, and also of the Divine goodness, of the Divine love for them.

The human tenderness of this created love of Jesus comes before us first in His condescension to the different characters He met, and then in the charm of His conversation with each. All these bring Him before us as lovable beyond all words, as one who understands ourselves and comes down to our level and wants to be intimate with us.

But the human love of the Lord Jesus leads us to contemplate what our faith reveals regarding the Divine love for man which was hidden in Him: the Divine love for us, infinite as God Himself, one with God Himself, for God is love.

That Divine love in Jesus is one and the same as the love of the Father for us. This love is not a mere movement or impression in God. It is a Divine Person, the Holy Ghost, and hence St. Thomas could say that God the Father loves us by the Holy Ghost.

We should rest in deep contentment in the contemplation of this ocean of eternal love which is brought to our thoughts by the exquisite tenderness of the human love of Jesus manifested in the details of His Easter apparitions.

The consideration of these gracious apparitions brings before us again the great predominating desire of the Risen Jesus—that *we should know Him* and, knowing Him, yield ourselves to Him, take up His sweet yoke, and thus attain to everlasting happiness.

“This is life eternal to know Thee, the One True God and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent.”

PRAYER

O Risen Lord, Who hast so touchingly manifested Thy Charity by the consideration and delicacy shown in the Easter apparitions, grant to us, Thy servants, that, contemplating this Charity, we may surrender ourselves to Thee without reserve and may spend ourselves for the spiritual and temporal good of our neighbours, knowing that all we do to them is done to Thee. Amen.

JESUS RISEN IS UNCHANGED IN KINDNESS

Points for Prayer

INTRODUCTION: The Easter Apparitions.

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