

December 27: Saint John, Apostle and Evangelist

Gospel for the feast of Saint John, Apostle and Evangelist, and commentary.

Gospel (*Jn 20:1-8*)

Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. So she ran, and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."

Peter then came out with the other disciple, and they went toward the tomb. They both ran, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first; and stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; he saw the linen cloths lying, and the napkin, which had been on his head, not lying with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed

Commentary

Today the liturgy celebrates the feast of Saint John, apostle and evangelist. According to tradition John is the “beloved disciple” who reclined on the Master’s side at the Last Supper

(cf. *Jn* 13:25); he accompanied Jesus during his agony on the Cross alongside Mary (*Jn* 19:26-27), and witnessed the empty tomb and later saw the Risen Lord (cf. *Jn* 20:2; 21:7).

In today's Gospel scene we see first Mary Magdalene and then Peter and John at the empty tomb. This scene is of utmost importance because the true dimension of Jesus' message is at stake, which John passed on to us so forcefully. Only if Jesus' love was stronger than death would it be worth risking everything for the Master. Without this victory, his words remain mere promises that would be lost with the passage of time.

The deep personal love that John experienced while close to the Lord made him vigilant for something great to happen after the events of the passion and death of Jesus. There was something authentic and

immortal in Jesus' love, which made him sense that the Master's story could not end in darkness.

Mary Magdalene's news about the empty tomb stirs up all these memories in John. His eagerness spurs him to run faster than Peter, although when he arrives he waits for Peter as a sign of respect for the head of the apostles. He sees the folded cloths, which vividly declare that the mystery of the resurrected One is also that of the crucified One.

And although the linen cloths did not provide absolute certainty, John's heart was enveloped in the clarity that only love can bring. Seeing the empty tomb he knew that everything the Master had said was true. Jesus had truly risen and now they would soon see and hear him again.

There is a beautiful ancient hymn composed in honor of the evangelist that is recited in the liturgy of the

hours. It can help remind us that in the beloved disciple we all have a model to imitate, since we are all called to the same deep love for the risen Lord.

You revealed to John
your highest decrees
and the intimate secrets
of future events.

Help me understand
all that John has written of.

Let me, Lord, rest
my head on your side.

At the Supper you opened
the door to your heart,
and at the transfiguration
led him alongside you.

Allow me to penetrate
your sacred mysteries.

Let me, Lord, rest
my head on your side.

On Mount Calvary
you left in his hands
the most holy reliquary,
the flesh where you dwelled,
and made him
the closely adopted son.

Let me, Lord, rest
my head on your side.

And you, John, who
responded to so much love with love
and gave your whole life

for your God and Lord,
teach me to walk
where you have walked.

Teach me to rest
my head on his side. Amen

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