



Running to the tomb.

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Looking at our TV Screens, social media and newspapers there are many distressing scenes of people running; running away from the bombs and invasion in Ukraine and in Ethiopia; running away from rising flood waters; running away from just the difficulties that life throws at us, including COVID.

Right from when the first disciples expressed their wish, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus”, our Catholic faith has always had a visual component; it has never been afraid to depict what faith looks like.

One such depiction is to be found in the old railway station, turned art gallery, the Musée D’Orsay in Paris. It is the wonderful oil painting by Eugene Burnand entitled, *Peter and John running to the tomb* on the first Easter Sunday morning.

They are not running away but rather running to what seems to be death, the place of defeat.

Even the most avid readers of the Gospels cannot quite imagine the dramatic change of mood in Jesus’ disciples from the afternoon of Good Friday till Easter morning. They had invested three years, three hard, intensive, exhilarating years with the one they believed would deliver Israel from its oppressors. Yet he did not sound like a revolutionary who could overthrow the Romans. He was more interested in attacking hypocrites and reaching out to lowlife outcasts.

But now all seemed lost. Jesus was betrayed, tortured and put to death on a Roman gallows. And yet... a strange turn of events had occurred. Mary Magdalene had come to honour the tomb early Sunday morning and found the very large boulder blocking the entrance removed. Jesus' body was no longer there. She ran to tell Peter and John. They ran to the tomb. The biblical text tells us John outran Peter. Could it be? Could it be that all Jesus had said about being raised up the third day was somehow true?

The painting is certainly direct and human, we can immediately identify with the emotions depicted.

It is easy to relate to the sunrise reflected onto the faces of old Peter and young John, illuminating the unbelievable anticipation of what they dare hardly hope they will find.

We don't know all that was going on inside their minds. But the Eugène Burnand image captures well their emotional state. Like children running to greet their beloved father home after a long trip or to discover the present they never imagined anyone would give them, John and Peter run to the tomb to verify what Mary had reported. John, wearing white, symbol of purity, clasps his hands like a football fan hoping against hope that his team will stay ahead to the end. Peter, somewhat older, his face wizened from numerous fishing trips, holds his hands to his chest – is it true? Am I about to see the one I so dearly love even though I denied him under pressure?

The genius of this painting is as much in what we don't see as in what we do see. Though John and Peter are gazing ahead, we must imagine what they behold by seeing through their eyes. Is this not the essence of faith? We know it is true, we know Jesus rose, but we have not actually seen him as yet.

This Easter we too, like the disciples Peter and John, run to the tomb of Jesus with a mixture of thoughts feelings and faith. We run not away from death but towards He who is our life. This pattern is set down in our lives at our Baptism. At Easter we renew our baptismal life and know that we belong not to death but to life.

A blessed Easter to you all

God is good, good indeed.

+ Patrick O'Regan
Archbishop of Adelaide
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