

## **The holy Women at the Sepulchre**

The holy women were very near the door of Nicodemus's house at the moment of our Lord's Resurrection; but they did not see anything of the prodigies which were taking place at the sepulchre. They were not aware that guards had been placed around the tomb, for they had not visited it on the previous day, on account of its being the Sabbath. They questioned one another anxiously concerning what would have to be done about the large stone at the door, as to who would be the best person to ask about removing it, for they had been so engrossed by grief that they had not thought about it before. Their intention was to pour precious ointments upon the body of Jesus, and then to strew over it flowers of the most rare and aromatic kinds, thus rendering all the honour possible to their Divine Master in his sepulchre.



Salome, who had brought more things than anyone else, was a rich lady, who lived in Jerusalem, a relation of St. Joseph, but not the mother of John. The holy women came to the determination of putting down their spices on the stone which closed the door of the monument, and waiting until someone came to roll it back. The guards were still lying on the ground, and the strong convulsions which even then shook them clearly demonstrated how great had been their terror, and the large stone was cast on one side, so that the door could be opened without difficulty. I could see the linen cloth in which the body of Jesus had been wrapped scattered about in the tomb, and the large winding-sheet lying in the same place as when they left it, but doubled together in such a manner that you saw at once that it no longer contained anything but the spices which had been placed round the body, and the bandages were on the outside of the tomb.

The linen cloth in which Mary had enveloped the sacred head of her Son was still there. I saw the holy women coming into the garden; but when they perceived the light given by the lamps of the sentinels, and the prostrate forms of the soldiers round the tomb, they for the most part became much alarmed, and retreated towards Golgotha. Mary Magdalen was, however, more courageous, and, followed by Salome, entered the garden while the other women remained timidly on the outside. Magdalen started, and appeared for a moment terrified when she drew near the sentinels.

She retreated a few steps and rejoined Salome, but both quickly recovered their presence of mind, and walked on together through the midst of the prostrate guards, and entered into the cave which contained the sepulchre. They immediately perceived that the stone was removed, but the doors were closed, which had been done in all probability by Cassius.

Magdalen opened them quickly, looked anxiously into the sepulchre, and was much surprised at seeing that the cloths in which they had enveloped our Lord were lying on one side, and that the place where they had deposited the sacred remains was empty. A celestial light filled the cave, and an angel was seated on the right side. Magdalen became almost beside herself from disappointment and alarm. I do not know whether she heard the words which the angel addressed to her, but she left the garden as quickly as possible, and ran to the town to inform the Apostles who were assembled there of what had taken place. I do not know whether the angel spoke to Mary Salome, as she did not enter the sepulchre; but I saw her leaving the garden directly after Magdalen, in order to relate all that had happened to the rest of the holy women, who were both frightened and delighted at the news, but could not make up their minds as to whether they would go to the garden or not.

In the mean time Cassius had remained near the sepulchre in hopes of seeing Jesus, as he thought he would be certain to appear to the holy women; but seeing nothing, he directed his steps towards Pilate's palace to relate to him all that had happened, stopping, however, first at the place where the rest of the holy women were assembled, to tell them what he had seen, and to exhort them to go immediately to the garden. They followed his advice, and went there at once. No sooner had they reached the door of the sepulchre than they beheld two angels clothed in sacerdotal vestments of the most dazzling white. The women were very much alarmed, covered their faces with their hands, and prostrated almost to the ground; but one of the angels addressed them, bade them not fear, and told them that they must not seek for their crucified Lord there, for that he was alive, had risen, and was no longer an inhabitant of the tomb. He pointed out to them at the same moment the empty sepulchre, and ordered them to go and relate to

the disciples all that they had seen and heard. He likewise told them that Jesus would go before them into Galilee, and recalled to their minds the words which our Saviour had addressed to them on a former occasion: 'The Son of Man will be delivered into the hands of sinners, he will be crucified, and the third day rise again.' The angels then disappeared, and left the holy women filled with joy, although of course greatly agitated; they wept, looked at the empty tomb and linen clothes, and immediately started to return to the town. But they were so much overcome by the many astounding events which had taken place, that they walked very slowly, and stopped and looked back often, in hopes of seeing our Lord, or at least Magdalen. In the mean time Magdalen reached the Cenaculum. She was so excited as to appear like a person beside herself, and knocked hastily at the door. Some of the disciples were still sleeping, and those who were risen were conversing together. Peter and John opened the door, but she only exclaimed, without entering the house, 'They have taken away the body of my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him,' and immediately returned to the garden.

Peter and John went back into the house, and after saying a few words to the other disciples followed her as speedily as possible, but John far outstripped Peter. I then saw Magdalen reenter the garden, and direct her steps towards the sepulchre; she appeared greatly agitated partly from grief, and partly from having walked so fast. Her garments were quite moist with dew, and her veil hanging on one side, while the luxuriant hair in which she had formerly taken so much pride fell in dishevelled masses over her shoulders, forming a species of mantle. Being alone, she was afraid of entering the cave, but stopped for a moment on the outside, and knelt down in order to see better into the tomb. She was endeavouring to push back her long hair, which fell over her face and obscured her vision, when she perceived the two angels who were seated in the tomb, and I heard one of them address her thus: 'Woman, why weepest thou?' She replied, in a voice choked with tears (for she was perfectly overwhelmed with grief at finding that the body of Jesus was really gone), 'Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.' She said no more, but seeing the empty winding-sheet, went out of the sepulchre and began to look about in other parts. She felt a secret presentiment that not only should she find Jesus, but that he was even then near to her; and the presence of the angels seemed not to disturb her in the least; she did not appear even to be aware that they were angels, every faculty was engrossed with the one thought, 'Jesus is not here! Where is Jesus?' I watched her wandering about like an insane person, with her hair floating loosely in the wind: her hair appeared to

annoy her much, for she again endeavoured to push it from off her face, and having divided it into two parts, threw it over her shoulders.

She then raised her head, looked around, and perceived a tall figure, clothed in white, standing at about ten paces from the sepulchre on the east side of the garden, where there was a slight rise in the direction of the town; the figure was partly hidden from her sight by a palm-tree, but she was somewhat startled when it addressed her in these words: 'Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou?' She thought it was the gardener; and, in fact, he had a spade in his hand, and a large hat (apparently made of the bark of trees) on his head. His dress was similar to that worn by the gardener described in the parable which Jesus had related to the holy women at Bethania a short time before his Passion. His body was not luminous, his whole appearance was rather that of a man dressed in white and seen by twilight. At the words, 'Whom seekest thou?' she looked at him, and answered quickly, 'Sir, if thou hast taken him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him; and I will take him away.' And she looked anxiously around. Jesus said to her, 'Mary.' She then instantly recognised his beloved voice, and turning quickly, replied, 'Rabboni (Master)!' She threw herself on her knees before him, and stretched out her hands to touch his feet; but he motioned her to be still, and said, 'Do not touch me, for I am not yet ascended to my Father; but go to my brethren and say to them: I ascend to my Father and to your Father, to my God and your God.' He then disappeared.

The reason of the words of Jesus, 'Do not touch me,' was afterwards explained to me, but I have only an indistinct remembrance of that explanation. I think he made use of those words because of the impetuosity of Magdalen's feelings, which made her in a certain degree forget the stupendous mystery which had been accomplished, and feel as if what she then beheld was still mortal instead of a glorified body. As for the words of Jesus, 'I am not yet ascended to my Father,' I was told that their meaning was that he had not presented himself to his Father since his Resurrection, to return him thanks for his victory over death, and for the work of the redemption which he had accomplished. He wished her to infer from these words, that the first-fruits of joy belong to God, and that she ought to reflect and return thanks to him for the accomplishment of the glorious mystery of the redemption, and for the victory which he had gained over death; and if she had kissed his feet as she used before the Passion, she

would have thought of nothing but her Divine Master, and in her raptures of love have totally forgotten the wonderful events which were causing such astonishment and joy in Heaven. I saw Magdalen arise quickly, as soon as our Lord disappeared, and run to look again in the sepulchre, as if she believed herself under the influence of a dream. She saw the two angels still seated there, and they spoke to her concerning the resurrection of our Lord in the same words as they had addressed the two other women. She likewise saw the empty winding-sheet, and then, feeling certain that she was not in a state of delusion, but that the apparition of our Lord was real, she walked quickly back towards Golgotha to seek her companions, who were wandering about to and from, anxiously looking out for her return, and indulging a kind of vague hope that they should see or hear something of Jesus.

The whole of this scene occupied a little more than two or three minutes. It was about half-past three when our Lord appeared to Magdalen, and John and Peter entered the garden just as she was leaving it. John, who was a little in advance of Peter, stopped at the entrance of the cave and looked in. He saw the linen clothes lying on one side, and waited until Peter came up, when they entered the sepulchre together, and saw the winding-sheet empty as has been before described. John instantly believed in the Resurrection, and they both understood clearly the words addressed to them by Jesus before his Passion, as well as the different passages in Scripture relating to that event, which had until then been incomprehensible to them. Peter put the linen clothes under his cloak, and they returned

hastily into the town through the small entrance belonging to Nicodemus. The appearance of the holy sepulchre was the same when the two Apostles entered as when Magdalen first saw it. The two adoring angels were seated, one at the head, and the other at the extremity of the tomb, in precisely the same attitude as when his adorable body was lying there. I do not think Peter was conscious of their presence. I afterwards heard John tell the disciples of Emmaus, that when he looked into the sepulchre he saw an angel. Perhaps he was startled by this sight, and therefore drew back and let Peter enter the sepulchre first; but it is likewise very possible that the reason of his not mentioning the circumstance in his gospel was because humility made him anxious to conceal the fact of his having been more highly favoured than Peter.

The guards at this moment began to revive, and rising, gathered up their lances, and took down the lamps, which were on the door, from whence they

cast a glimmering weak light on surrounding objects. I then saw them walk hastily out of the garden in evident fear and trepidation, in the direction of the town.

In the mean time Magdalen had rejoined the holy women, and given them the account of her seeing the Lord in the garden, and of the words of the angels afterwards, whereupon they immediately related what had been seen by themselves, and Magdalen wended her way quickly to Jerusalem, while the women returned to that side of the garden where they expected to find the two Apostles. Just before they reached it, Jesus appeared to them. He was clothed in a long white robe, which concealed even his hands, and said to them, 'All hail.' They started with astonishment, and cast themselves at his feet; he spoke a few words, held forth his hand as if to point out something to them, and disappeared. The holy women went instantly to the Cenaculum, and told the disciples who were assembled there that they had seen the Lord; the disciples were incredulous, and would not give credence either to their account or to that of Magdalen. They treated both the one and the other as the effects of their excited imaginations; but when Peter and John entered the room and related what they likewise had seen, they knew not what to answer, and were filled with astonishment.

Peter and John soon left the Cenaculum, as the wonderful events which had taken place rendered them extremely silent and thoughtful, and before long they met James the Less and Thaddeus, who had wished to accompany them to the sepulchre. Both James and Thaddeus were greatly overcome, for the Lord had appeared to them a short time before they met Peter and John. I also saw Jesus pass quite close to Peter and John. I think the former recognised him, for he started suddenly, but I do not think the latter saw him.