Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



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“Woman, why are you weeping?” (John 20:13).

Easter Tuesday

Acts 2:36-41; Jn 20:11-18

Among the many horror stories from the pandemic were accounts of families kept from the deathbeds of loved ones dying alone in hospitals and nursing homes, then trying to locate and identify the body among hundreds of others sent to a

refrigerated truck or makeshift morgue. The virus took a loved one and then robbed families of the chance to see them again to say goodbye.

Today's Gospel about Mary at the tomb has all the shock and drama of such human suffering. She is not there to see a resurrection. She has already seen the terrible death and the rushed burial of a corpse, drained of blood and breath, battered almost beyond recognition, and she does not imagine she will ever see Jesus alive again. Mary is there to complete the anointing, to grieve and say goodbye.

But she cannot find the body, and this last cruelty is more than she can bear, so she weeps inconsolably. "They have taken him away and I can't find him," she says to two strangers who intrude on her grief to ask why she is weeping. She says the same to a curious gardener, accusing him of moving the body. Only when he says her name, "Mary," does she know that it is Jesus.

But the story becomes stranger still. When Mary reaches out to embrace him, he tells her not to hold him, for he is in transition. "Noli me tangere," Latin for "Do not hold me" that inspired Fra Angelico's image of a dancing Jesus, reveals Mary's final loss. For her beloved teacher must now "go to the Father" to complete his transformation, and Mary must let her love for Jesus be transformed as well in order to know him as Lord and Christ.

Mary teaches us by fully grieving the death of Jesus and emptying herself of any illusion that death is not real and a devastating attack on hope and human love. Mary lets despair strip her of sentiment, enduring the ache of losing everything she had in this world. Only then, helpless before death's power, does real faith come to lift her into a new relationship with Jesus, who is now revealed as the Christ.

Like Peter, Mary's grief was what baptized her to be the "Apostle to the Apostles," the first one to hear the Gospel. Like the prophet Elijah, sheltering in a cave on a mountain, Mary has felt the wind, the earthquake and the fire (1 Kgs 19:12) before she finally hears the tiny whisper of God saying her name, and she knows the voice is from Jesus, calling her to a new life and a new mission.

Mary's tears are part of our search for the body of Jesus. To know him as risen we must also know him as crucified. True compassion connects us to the grief of others. It also prepares us for our own deaths by a lifelong process of emptying ourselves in the service of others. Then, when the time comes for us to surrender ourselves to God, we, too, will hear Jesus calling us by name and welcoming us into the company

of the saints.