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Homily at Mass Easter Sunday, Year C – 21 April 2019

St Luke tells us exactly what happened at the tomb where Jesus had been buried after his death on the Cross. Women disciples and friends of Jesus and the apostles discovered the stone – a huge round stone – that had sealed the entry of the tomb had been rolled away. They met two men – or were they angels – dressed in brilliant clothes who told them that Jesus was risen, alive. These women then carried this incredible – literally unbelievable – message to the Apostles. And in order to verify this story, to confirm its authenticity and reality, St Luke tells us the names of these women: Mary Magdalene, Joanna (her husband Chuza was an official in the royal court of King Herod), and Mary, the mother of the apostle James.

St Luke has an eye for detail – Tradition tells us that not only was he a gifted author of both the Gospel that bears his name as well as in the Acts of the Apostles, he was also a doctor and an artist. Luke's account of the resurrection is full of detail – the sort of detail that he learnt from eye witnesses – those who were there, the women who saw the angels and heard their message: they saw the opened tomb, the empty tomb, they remembered the surprise and shock of Peter and the others when they brought them this incredible news.

These women could take some pride in the fact that they were the first to learn of our Lord's resurrection, the first to proclaim it – we could say preach it – to men like Peter and the others who received it initially as “nonsense” women's tales, myths, unbelievable ravings, pure emotion. But to this day the jaw of Mary Magdalene who plays such a central role in all the Gospel accounts of the Resurrection of Jesus is preserved and can be venerated in an ancient basilica in the south of France where she came as a missionary in the first years of Christianity. With that jaw – her mouth, her lips, her tongue – as well as her certainty, her joy, her conviction that her own eyes had seen the risen Jesus, her lips had kissed his feet, her hands had touched his risen body, her arms had embraced him, Mary Magdalene gave convincing testimony to the truth and reality of all that you and I believe and celebrate today. It is the Gospel truth we live. It gives us hope. It gives meaning to our lives. It is the joy of our weekly Sunday Mass. It is the vision of life that gives us eyes to see that there is life beyond death, the life of Heaven, eternal life, life with God forever.

For us, the Risen Christ brings gifts far better than any number of Easter Eggs.

First of all he brings us the gift of Sunday, we call it the Lord's Day. Sunday is our weekly Easter. Sunday is made holy, it draws its meaning from the celebration of Mass. Only here in the Church, in God's House, is the Word of God read, celebrated, preached. Only here, in God's House, does God bring his family together – a congregation, a gathering together of all Christ's sheep and lambs, that inspires us, encourages us, reminds us that we don't live Christian life alone – we are God's Family, God's Holy People, brothers and sisters in Christ our Lord. Only here, in God's house, we celebrate the Eucharist and receive Christ, the Risen Christ, the Bread of Life.

Rising from the dark and cold of the Tomb Jesus brings us joy, freedom, fresh hope. His hands and feet still bear the mark of the nails – reminders of his suffering and death, but signs – we could say trophies – that reassure us that suffering, pain, sickness, worry, disappointment, hurt – none of these are the last word – these things don't claim victory in our life: the Risen Jesus is Lord, the all-conquering Lord, the Lord of our lives.

The most beautiful gift the Risen Christ gives us is his Church – the family that surrounds us now, the great Universal family that embraces the saints in Heaven, Pope Francis our bishops, priests and all of us who share baptism and faith in Christ, as well as the dead who like us look forward in hope to the life of Heaven. How do you think of the Church? The Body of Christ. The Bride of Christ. The Holy People of God. The Pilgrim People of God. A community of saints and sinners. Today we rejoice that we are God's Church – we renew the promises of Baptism and we receive the blessing of Easter water sprinkled on us like gentle rain that renews us, refreshes us, re-focuses us as brothers and sisters in the Risen Christ.