

Easter Sunday – April 5, 2026 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.  
Cathedral of Saint Paul, Birmingham, Alabama – 11:00am Sunday Mass – 865 words

This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad!

This Easter, I want to focus on three of the people who relate the story of the Resurrection to us, as provided in this set of readings. There was Saint Peter in the first Reading, Saint Paul in the Second, and then in the Sequence and also in the Gospel, Saint Mary Magdalene. Each of them had a past – indeed, a sinful and a checkered one; each of them was chosen by our Lord; each had a saving encounter with him that completely changed their life; and each became a witness to his Resurrection.

The first reading gives us probably what was just the summary portion of Peter’s much longer sermon – they preached much longer back then! (I always think of the story from the Acts of the Apostles where it effectively says that Paul had preached so long that a man sitting in the window fell asleep, then fell to his death – and Paul had to bring him back to life. “Death by homily” is apparently a real thing. But I digress.) So anyway, Peter is preaching a basic proclamation of the Good News, with confident boldness.

But we know Peter’s background: we know he was a man of highs and lows, an impulsive type, who at one moment professed that he would follow our Lord to death, then some moments later was weeping bitterly for having denied Christ. At one moment he confessed the true faith, and in the next moment he tried to impede Jesus from following his mission. And so on. Can any of us relate to Peter, with his fits and starts, with his steps forward and backward? But Jesus was able to save Peter, and he did.

What about Paul? He could have had a million regrets for what amounted to persecuting Christ himself, who identifies fully with his people: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” He even cooperated in putting Christians to death, including St. Stephen, the protomartyr. Can any of us relate to having wasted time in our own lives by going totally in the wrong direction, even against God? But Paul learned to seek what was above, not to navel-gaze and wallow in self-pity. And it pleased Jesus to save Paul, too.

Then there is our dear St. Mary Magdalene. What intimacy she had with Jesus; how heartfelt were her words, “They have taken the Lord from the tomb...!” But she was the woman who previously had been possessed; the scriptures possibly identify her also as one who had given herself over to a life of immorality. We get the sense that she is the type who may have broken every one of the commandments. Can any of us relate to some aspect of her past? Yet Jesus was happy to save her also.

And with all three, he then privileged them with being witnesses to his Resurrection. “Speak Mary, declaring, what you saw, wayfaring. ‘The tomb of Christ who is living, the glory of Jesus’ resurrection; bright angels attesting, the shroud and napkin resting’.” We can relate variously to St. Peter, St. Paul, or St. Mary Magdalene, or some combination of them or any number of other saints – all of whom had a past. However, is there some way that we can relate to their experience of the Resurrection, also?

For those who have faith, we can: for we are among the blessed “who have not seen, yet believed”. Each week, as we encounter Christ in the Holy Eucharist, we encounter him risen from the dead and alive forevermore. However often we go before him in Confession, too, we encounter through the priest the Risen Lord who gave him the power forgive post-baptismal sins. Yes, through the eyes of faith, we encounter Jesus Christ powerfully in all the sacraments – but especially in the Eucharist and in Confession.

Faith, then, completes the circle. Like Peter, Paul, and Mary Magdalene, we all have a sinful and checkered past. Like Peter, Paul, and Mary Magdalene, we have each and all been chosen by our Lord (or else, let's be clear, we would not be here). Like Peter, Paul, and Mary Magdalene, we have had a saving encounter with him, especially and primarily through Baptism, and nourished by the other sacraments, especially Holy Eucharist and Holy Confession, which maintains our living link with the Risen One.

Yes: we, too, are witnesses of his Resurrection. What Peter, Paul, and Mary Magdalene experienced in some way in-person and by sight, we know by faith – and the story must continue to be told. That story, which includes ups and downs, many happinesses but many tears also, and countless surprises, continues to unfold in us. The Lord is at work in us, to continue our transformation and make us more fully living witnesses to the truth that he is with us always, that he loves us, that he desires us, that he is on our side, and that he has a plan for us and for everyone that will bring us to eternal gladness.

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