

**Catholic Church of the Beatitudes
Santa Barbara, CA**

**"Every shuteye ain't sleep and every goodbye ain't gone."
Michael Tompkins**

**Easter Vigil, March 31, 2018
Reflections on Jn 20:1-9**

***The Cost*
Genie Hoyne**

As I ponder the crucified Christ
One body becomes another
The terror of the empty tomb

Woman, why are you weeping?
Between sobs of grief she asks
Tell me where you have put him
And Jesus said, "Mary."

Her inexplicable radiance
As Christ embraces her with recognition
Alleviates the pain loss demands
Transforms her to
Empower others

All homilies must begin somewhere, and I could think of no better place than Genie's poem. When I was asked to participate in our Triduum this year, of course, I was so grateful, then a fleeting egoic thought passed through me, "Gosh, wouldn't it be great to be asked to preach?" Then Jeanette did ask, and I was freaked out. Can I do it? What if I fail?

There is a similar story in Maya Angelou's autobiography, *The Heart of A Woman*, where she is approached by Bayard Rustin, the Director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, to continue the work of SCLC as the next Director. Bayard had seen Maya in action—a true leader of people, a woman of courage, intelligence and full of grace. Bayard

believed that Maya knew what the vision of MLK was about. He knew her and believed in her gifts to continue Martin's mission.

Abruptly, Maya ended the interview saying that she had to *think about it*. She was freaked out. Exiting the SCLC office and into the streets of Harlem where she could breathe, she met up with a friend with whom Maya confided, "Can I do it? I'd rather not try than try and fail."

Her friend responded, "That's stupid talk, Maya. Every try will not succeed. But if you're going to live, live at all, your business is trying. And if you fail once, so what? *Old* folks say, "Every shuteye ain't sleep and every goodbye ain't gone. You get up and try again."

Imagine talks between Mary and Jesus sitting by late night fires along the Sea of Galilee while the other apostles slept. Like Bayard knew Maya, Jesus knew that Mary grasped his real message: the moment-by-moment decisive opportunity to become Christ in the world. Moments where there will be failure, disappointment, confusion, betrayal, self-doubt . . . and moments of unexpected joy and gradual awakening toward becoming the living Christ.

Mary worries aloud, "Can I do it? I'd rather not try than try and fail." And Jesus says, "That's stupid talk, Mary! Every try will not succeed. But if you're going to live, live at all, your business is trying. And if you fail once, so what?"

As my friend, Sister Eva Lumas taught me, "What would you do if you knew that *you could not fail?*" (2x --pause)

To live in uncertainty, to not know from one moment to the next what is going to happen. Imagine!

- One minute you have people singing Hosanna, the next a crown of thorns is pressing into your forehead.
- One minute you are washing your friends' feet, the next they are betraying you and getting as far away from you as possible.
- One minute you are praying to be released from the suffering you know is coming, the next they are driving nails into your hands and feet.
- One minute you are carrying your cross and the next you're looking down while hanging from it.

The writhing pain has actually stopped. You look around. In that moment everything becomes crystal clear. They have no idea what they are doing or what they have done.

Pharisees and Sadducees. Crowds turned mob. Soldiers and criminals. You try to comfort them while you are, in fact, about to die. You see your mother's anguish—a mother's worst nightmare, watching her child dying and

powerless to do a damn thing about it. You see your beloved brother and friend watching you, in shock.

You give one to the other, a sort of consolation prize, but a gesture nonetheless. You forgive them. Forgive them. Forgive and breathe your last . . . (pause)

Skull place fades and the garden that surrounds it forms. Wrapped in shroud-like swaddling clothes, he is laid to rest in manger tomb. The stone is rolled into place. The Word made flesh no longer is dwelling among us. The world goes silent and dark.

Like a descent into hell, we know what it is like when someone we love dies. Everything changes. There is no real comfort unless platitudes can be believed. What to do? Where to go? How to respond? How to survive? Eternity passes and passes and passes. (pause)

She does not sleep. In the middle of the night she wraps a shawl tightly around her shoulders because she is bone chilled, and walks out into darkness, no lantern. Without thinking she finds herself walking the same road he took just a day or so before. What is time? She hopes in vain to feel him beside her under the stars. But, no. He is buried in a tomb, she reminds herself, and here she is standing in front of it, the stone rolled aside. Commotion. Panic. Running. Tears streaming down her face. Dread. Hope. Fear. When she encounters the gardener, no less.

The groundskeeper. She laughs to herself at the absurdity of her thought. . . There's something so familiar about him.

He says her name. She recognizes that it is not the gardener at all. It is her friend, her teacher, her beloved.

More uncertainty. Neither knowing what has happened or what will happen in the next moment. She wants to smother him in kisses and he tells her not to get too close.

Both have changed. Both transformed by some inexplicable mystery. They stand motionless looking at one another. Astonished!

Let us understand ourselves in the life, death and resurrection of the Christ, through this divinely human moment between Mary and

Jesus. In one story we imagine the grief Mary experienced when she arrived at the empty tomb in darkness, and as the day awakened, so did she: to the transformed, living presence of the Christ in Jesus, and in herself—inexplicable radiance, as Genie feels this moment, one that “alleviates the pain loss demands . . . the descent from cross into tomb, from darkness into Christ’s light.

Now we can look at the Cross, Death and Resurrection in a light that embraces us. Now we can understand how Thomas Merton was able to preach, “Christians must rediscover the truth that the Cross is a sign of life, renewal, affirmation and joy, not of death, negation and the refusal of life. We must allow the providential opportunities that come to us in the midst of darkness, and mud. Not only are we other Christs but we are other Marys who are to give birth to the Christ in our work and in our persons and in our culture. We are all meant to be mothers of God, for Christ is always needing to be born.”

It is living with understanding and wisdom through crosses, deaths and resurrections with Maya’s courage, intelligence and grace; Mary’s faithfulness to Truth; the resilience of this Community of Beatitudes, goodness personified and embodied in you; and, Jesus eternal presence and confounding absence.

Our imperfect attempts to love every single thing . . .

Not grasping anything too tightly, but loving it enough that in losing it, which we will, there is loss, finding, and becoming something exquisitely uncertain and unknown.

And when Jesus asks Mary of Magdala to step back when she recognizes him?

Old folks say, “Every shuteye ain’t sleep and every goodbye ain’t gone. You get up and try again.”

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