

# Homily on Easter Sunday at the General House

April 24th, 2011 - Rome

*"If only you recognized God's gift..."* (Jn. 10). Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman invite us to be filled with wonder at the mystery of the Paschal Feast we are celebrating in this Sacred Triduum. If only **we** could recognize the gift of Jesus' Resurrection and the new life shared with us through Baptism! We express our belief and our joy through the celebration of the Easter sacraments, in our prayer and song, our voices echoing with alleluias to the Risen Lord. We remember the beautiful words of the Exultet:

*"This is the night  
when Christians everywhere,  
washed clean of sin and freed from all defilement,  
are restored to grace and grow together in holiness.  
This is the night  
when Jesus Christ broke the chains of death  
and rose triumphant from the grave...  
Father, how wonderful your care for us!  
How boundless your merciful love!"* (Exultet)

For a moment, we look backward in time to the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve walked with God in the evenings, enjoying the intimacy of his friendship. Then the serpent invited them to taste of the fruit of the tree so that their eyes would be opened and they would be like gods. They, who were made in the image and likeness of God, succumbed to the tempter's lie to become like gods. The Incarnation goes in a totally opposite direction: Though he was God, Jesus did not cling to his divinity, but emptied himself and became a slave, obedient even to death. This was the way of healing the wound and reconciling humanity and God, restoring the friendship. We remember the beginning of the Sacred Triduum, the Lord's Supper, in which Jesus washed and kissed his disciples' feet and told them they were no longer servants but friends. *If only we recognized God's gift...*

This deep relationship is seen in the Gospel today: love and friendship with Jesus as expressed in Saint Peter; in the beloved disciple and in Saint Mary of Magdala. Mary, who runs off to tell Peter and the beloved disciple that she didn't find the body of Jesus at the tomb, takes us back to the beginning of time, again to the Garden of Eden where humankind was friend of God. In the mists of morning, she's searching for him whom her heart loves. Our hearts feel that a new creation is astir on this first day of the week! Psalm 63, our morning prayer throughout the Easter Octave, expresses Mary's longing and that of all humanity: "O God, you are my God, for you I seek; my soul thirsts for you like parched land, weary and lifeless; for your love is better than life, my soul clings to you..."

In the Garden Mary doesn't meet a serpent, but angels, and a "Gardener" appears. Is it the great Gardener, who tends the world with infinite love, with patience? The Gardener speaks: "Mary!" Chapter ten of the Gospel of Saint John comes to mind: "The sheep hear his voice as he calls his own by name... I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me in the same way that the Father knows me and I know my Father; for these sheep I will give my life" (Jn.10:3 < 14). The woman... she is Eve, she is Mary, and she is humankind... responds with love, "Rabbouni!" We are brought into intimacy with God, right into that love between the Father and the Son! *If only we could recognize God's gift...!*

Mary longs to embrace Jesus as our soul longs to cling to God. Jesus tells her not to cling, for: "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God!" The Father of Jesus has become our Father. The God of Jesus has become our God. The new and eternal covenant has been established. By the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus, we find our way home, back to the Garden of friendship and intimacy, new-born daughters and sons of a most loving Father. Our home is the heart of God. Again, we recall words from the Exultet:

*“Night truly blessed when heaven is wedded to earth and humanity is reconciled with God!” (Exultet)*

*If only we could recognize the gift of God...!*

We have been plunged into the fullness of new life through Baptism. In his letter to the Colossians Paul stirs us up to see that this gift demands of us a new vision and a new way of living. Our hearts must be intent on higher realms and things above. Our lives are fixed on Jesus and the values of the kingdom. Becoming friends of God and filled with God’s life means we are intent on forgiveness, truth, mercy, compassion and solidarity. We are on fire with the gifts of the Spirit. *“If only we could recognize the gift of God...!*

In today’s reading from the Acts of the Apostles, Peter proclaims the wonderful things that have taken place in Jesus. We respond to this Good News by committing ourselves to the mission of proclaiming the Gospel. Our hearts burn with the desire to tell the whole world how good God is! This was Saint Eugene de Mazenod’s experience, was it not? Having experienced love, forgiveness and reconciliation in an overwhelming way on Good Friday, 1807, Eugene’s life became focused and he had a vision: to become the priest and servant of the poor, spreading the Good News of God’s saving love to the most abandoned. Being called and sent as missionaries we deepen our faith in the holy mysteries we preach. *“If we only we could recognize the gift of God...!”*

This holy Resurrection Day invites us to contemplate and be fascinated by the mysteries of the Lord’s Pasch in all their beauty and depth. The sacred liturgy is rich with hymns and symbols: the washing of the feet; the Paschal Candle; the blessed water; the renewal of our Baptismal vows in which our religious life as Oblates is rooted. Above all, the Word of God has offered light and strength for our journey of faith. And it is the Bread of the new and eternal covenant which has been taken, blessed, broken and given that is our nourishment. It is here that we meet the Risen Lord and with the disciples we say, “Lord, stay with us!” It is from this Table of the Word and of the Bread of Life that we are fed and sent forth as missionaries to witness to the gift of new life. May the Risen Lord open our eyes and our hearts to recognize, contemplate and love the great gift we have received in his Resurrection.

We give thanks for so wonderful a gift, the gift of God! Happy Easter!