

Mary the Magdalene comes to the disciples, announcing: "I have seen the Lord," as well as the things he told her (John 20:18, Hart's translation).

*One day when I was at prayer, writes St Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), I saw Christ at my side—or to put it better, I was conscious of Him, for I saw nothing with my eyes or in my imagination. He seemed quite close to me. He was speaking to me.*

*Being completely ignorant that such visions were possible, I was very much afraid at first, and could do nothing but weep, though as soon as he spoke His first word of assurance to me, I regained my usual calm, and became cheerful and free from fear.*

*All the time Christ seemed to be at my side, but as this was not an imaginary vision I could not see in what form. How then can I know and affirm that He is beside me with greater certainty than if I saw Him?*

*He appears to the soul by a knowledge brighter than the sun. I do not mean that any sun is seen, or any brightness, but there is a light which, though unseen, illumines the understanding.*

Invisibility and visibility—hidden presence and manifested mystery—this dialectic of seeming incompatibles has always been the very stuff of immediate consciousness of divine presence.

W. H. Auden remembers, *One fine summer night in June 1933 I was sitting on a lawn after dinner with three colleagues (teachers), two women and one man. We liked each other well enough but we were not intimate friends. Incidentally, we had not drunk any alcohol.*

*We were talking casually about every day matters when, quite suddenly and unexpectedly, something happened. I felt myself invaded by a power which, though I consented to it, was irresistible and certainly not mine.*

*For the first time in my life I knew exactly what it means to love one's neighbor as oneself . . . My personal feelings towards my colleagues were unchanged—they were still colleagues, not intimate friends—but I felt their existence as themselves to be of infinite value and rejoiced in it.*

*The memory of this experience and asking myself what it could mean was one of the most crucial factors that brought me back to Christianity.*

Awakening to conscious awareness of divine presence happens in a garden contemplating hydrangeas, at the beach watching the sunrise, in the mountains gazing at the stars, in a library reading a book, in a private room meditating, in a hospital bed facing death, in a prison cell facing oneself, in worship praying the liturgy, singing

hymns, listening to beautiful music, paying attention to the sermon, celebrating the sacraments.

This is why the author of Colossians encourages us to *set our minds on the things above, not the things on earth*. A mind completely cluttered with anxiety, worry, vanity or resentment, is going to find it hard to give way to moments of gift and surprise.

When our minds are self-absorbed, like the disciples in grief, in despair, we need some extraordinary experience that pushes its way through the inward clutter by sheer force and novelty; we need to be shocked to open us up to joy.

Mary Magdalene was exhausted by grief. With Jesus everything had died. Who knows why she thought she was going to the borrowed tomb in the garden, but who knows why we do lots of things when we are worn out by life? In her deepest despair Mary hears her name called by the voice she loves and she turns. In that turning her life changes, everything changes.

What was it like for those first few hours after the tomb was found empty, after Mary Magdalene delivered her breathless message? It must have been a period of alarming uncertainty, half hope, half terror. How would we cope with a shock that would make us rethink most of what we have taken for granted?

People in the middle of extreme stress bear witness to an overwhelming sense of being where they should be, being in tune with something or someone, being rooted in the moment in a way that doesn't at all blur the reality of what's in front of their eyes but gives what is needed to sit in the presence of horror and grief, and live.

The resurrection of despairing disciples would be unthinkable without the continuing awareness of an active, perceptible encounter with the divine. Mary and the disciples are inhabited by a holy presence out of which all things come, and at the same time inhabit a world that is larger than that immediately visible or tangible.

To be a Christian in the wake of Easter is not primarily to possess a certain set of beliefs about a distant God or even a savior-figure; it is to see and imagine oneself afresh in relation to a hidden presence and manifested mystery.

To be a Christian in the wake of Easter is to know we have died and our life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, our life, is made manifest, then we too will be made manifest along with him in glory.