



Easter

From Observing to Perceiving

“After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see/observe the tomb.” The women set out before daylight, just as the first streaks of dawn were brightening the night sky. Dawn is a magical moment, restoring life and color to reality, which reawakens at its touch. It helps us see everything in a new light. At dawn on Easter day, the women hadn’t the faintest clue that they were heading toward an extraordinary and unrepeatable event.

They set out to “see/observe” the tomb of Jesus, just as they had observed his crucifixion from afar. In the same way that they had watched the last events in the earthly life of Jesus unfold, so too they saw/observed the very clear signs of his death.

But then something completely unexpected and out of the ordinary happened. The women came face to face with an angel, who said to them: “I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here. He is risen, as he said he would.”

It might seem puzzling that only these women [instead of one or some of the apostles] were privileged to have such a meeting but in actual fact it was only the female disciples of Jesus who continued to follow the Master throughout his tragic passion. Out of all his followers, it was only the women who did not run away. And they were the only ones who continued to seek him after his death, urged on by the intensity of their love for him. Consideration of all this prompts us to say that it is these women who teach us how to perceive reality, not just observe it.

What is the difference between *observing* and *perceiving*?

The act of *observation* takes place through the senses, which are limited to receiving input passively. How deep an impression that sensory data makes on a person depends on how pleasing or displeasing the experience was. This is the way children observe things: they see something and want it. They don’t ask where it came from. Thus observing ends by losing the other, the world and God because everything is concentrated on one’s personal experience.

In contrast to this is *perception*—a kind of “sixth sense” that is very alert and attentive to others and to situations. It sees things as they are, not the way one would like them to be. Perception builds enduring relationships.

In short, the women in this Gospel account do not limit themselves to simply observing the situation they encounter: they perceive what is happening. This is the point!

Consequently it is not surprising that even though, like all the other followers of Jesus, they were initially dismayed, doubtful and disillusioned, things did not end there. Their eyes were unveiled and they were overwhelmed by the resurrection. They were able to perceive the presence of the risen Lord and even sought to embrace him physically, although they were prevented from doing this.

Today we run the risk of drowning in sensory input that prevents us from perceiving reality. This is because we take self as our starting point in assessing things, without trying to identify what triggered the situation, without establishing profound relationships, and without allowing ourselves to be touched by the reality God presents to us.

Fr. Domenico Pompili

No Longer the Same

Nothing is the same any longer, not only in the lives of those women but also in our own lives and in the story of humanity. Jesus is not dead—he is risen. He is the Living One! He did not simply return to life: he is Life itself because he is the Son of the living God!

(Pope Francis)