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Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

We live in a time of uncertainty, so in a time for hope. The Passion according to John may help us to renew our hope. It is a story of death and life, of gift and violence; it is a love story for a time of uncertainty. It starts in the night and, as John says, it is cold. It starts in a garden, where people with torches and weapons come to arrest Jesus. The hour of Jesus has come. And this story of Good Friday ends in another garden, where the dead body of the King-Messiah is put into a tomb. But this story will not end there. Because on the morning of the first day of the week, Jesus will be present alive in this garden and he will reveal himself to Mary of Magdala, the apostle of the apostles, our patron as preachers.

So we move from one garden to another one, reminding ourselves of the rich symbolic density of the garden in the Scriptures: the garden of creation, with Adam and Eve, the garden of the beloved in the Canticle of Canticle. And in these gardens of the Passion and Resurrection, one question opens an horizon for our quest: Who are you looking for?, says Jesus during the cold evening to the soldiers in the beginning of our reading. And the Risen Jesus, in the freshness of the morning, will ask the same question to Mary of Magdala: Who are you looking for?

Whom are we looking for, night and day, in our gardens, in our confined places, our empty parks, our networks and screens, and especially in our inner gardens, more or less well kept, where we may have more time now to make a visit. Garden of confusion, violence and fear at the arrest, garden of grief, expectation or despair with a dead king in a tomb, garden of new life, of love and hope and a message from a gardener. But in these gardens, the question invites us to enter an obscure and luminous journey searching for the One, looking for Whom, and not for what.

Many people can be seen and heard in this dramatic story. They are not strangers: they look strangely like us, with the misery and greatness of our humanity:

Judas, who had been before in this garden, now leading armed soldiers and betraying Jesus. Peter, a leader, who reacts with violence, not listening to the word of Jesus and cutting a right ear, the one to listen to the word of God, and who will deny having been in the garden.



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Pilate, who understands what is happening, as a smart politician, but refuses to commit himself, (so he does not wash his hands in John); by handing an innocent man, he does not respect what is right. The Jewish religious leaders, who do not respect the Law and proclaim Cesar as their king, an act of idolatry from the Prophets' viewpoint.

But also, other faces of our humanity are there: three women and a disciple, standing near the cross, with faithfulness and compassion while four soldiers share Jesus's clothes, indifferent to the events. And among the four faithful, there is a mother and a beloved disciple, anonymous, without names, in the whole Gospel of John. As if they could have many names, even our own. And Joseph and Nicodemus who dare to be seen as disciples of Jesus and do the necessary rituals and care.

But the main face of our humanity in this drama is Jesus himself. He may look at first as a powerless victim, bound like Isaac for the sacrifice, beaten and laughed at like the Servant of Isaiah, put on the cross at the hour when the paschal lambs are immolated in the temple. The hour has come. And mere force seems to win again.

But John shows us many aspects of Jesus, as a sign of a renewed humanity, revealing the face of God. Ecce homo, here is the man, says Pilate. Yes, Jesus the new Adam for the new creation. When he is arrested, he cares for his disciples, let them go; at the end, before dying, he cares for the mother and the disciple; he is the good shepherd. He refuses to enter into the cycle of violence but when struck by a guard, he stands with dignity: Why do you strike me? His dialogue with Pilate is deep and truthful. And he dies giving up the spirit for the times to come.

Many voices, even the opponents, proclaim the identity of Jesus in this trial and also the voice of the Scriptures (a key for reading the Passion): he is the king, the lamb, the shepherd, the New Adam, the Servant, the Son of God. So this is a tough story but one of revelation, from a garden to another, between night and day.



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The Gospel of John starts with In the beginning. Now it is finished (or accomplished) Jesus says on the cross. But this death is a new beginning, it is a birth, as the blood and water coming from Jesus' side express it. This death is a birth, And the body is put into a new tomb; something new is inaugurated as a new life, a new creation in the garden of beginning again.

We are there in this story, through all the people from Judas to Nicodemus. But we are there also directly. The writer speaks to us: so that you also may believe. You? The reader, the hearer, us, as if the witness was getting out of the book and saying: « Hey, listen, read, this story of death and life, violence and love, this is for you. Hey, do you believe, do you hope? You are searching for the truth. Look at the man in the gardens and you may find the One you are looking for ». Who are we looking for in our cold nights and our fresh mornings, in our growing or abandoned gardens, in this time of uncertainty, a time for hope.

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