

## John: 20:1–18

### From Catena Aurea:

1. The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre.
2. Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him.
3. Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre.
4. So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre.
5. And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying: yet went he not in.
6. Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeing the linen clothes lie,
7. And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.
8. Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed.
9. For as yet they knew not the Scripture, that he must rise again from the dead.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. lxxxv) The Sabbath being now over, during which it was unlawful to be there, Mary Magdalene could rest no longer, but came very early in the morning, to seek consolation at the grave: The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre.

AUGUSTINE. (de Con. Evang. iii. 24) Mary Magdalene, undoubtedly the most fervent in love, of all the women that ministered to our Lord; so that John deservedly mentions her only, and says nothing of the others who were with her, as we know from the other Evangelists.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. cxx) Una sabbati is the day which Christians call the Lord's day, after our Lord's resurrection. Matthew calls it prima sabbati.

THEOPHYLACT. Or thus: The Jews called the days of the week sabbath, and the first day, one of the sabbaths, which day is a type of the life to come; for that life will be one day not cut short by any night, since God is the sun there, a sun which never sets. On this day then our Lord rose again, with an incorruptible body, even as we in the life to come shall put on incorruption.

AUGUSTINE. (de Con. Evang. iii. 24.) What Mark says, Very early in the morning, at the rising of the sun (Mark 16:1), does not contradict John's words, when it was yet dark. At the dawn of day, there are yet remains of darkness, which disappear as the light breaks in. We must not understand Mark's words, Very early in the morning, at the rising of the sun, ἡλίου ἀνατεέλαντος to mean that the sun was above the horizon, but rather what we ourselves ordinarily mean by the phrase, when we want any thing to be done very early, we say at the rising of the sun, i. e. some time before the sun is risen.

AUGUSTINE. (Con. Evang. iii. 24) Now took place what Matthew only relates, the earthquake, and rolling away of the stone, and fright of the guards.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. lxxxv. 4) Our Lord rose while the stone and seal were still on the sepulchre. But as it was necessary that others should be certified of this, the sepulchre is opened after the resurrection, and so the fact confirmed. This it was which roused Mary. For when she saw the stone taken away, she entered not nor looked in, but ran to the disciples with all the speed of love. But as yet she knew nothing for certain about the resurrection, but thought that His body had been carried off.

GLOSS. And therefore she ran to tell the disciples, that they might seek Him with her, or grieve with her: Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. cxx) This is the way in which he usually mentions himself. Jesus loved all, but him in an especial and familiar way. And saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid Him.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. cxx) Some of the Greek copies have, taken away my Lord, which is more expressive of love, and of the feeling of an handmaiden. But only a few have this reading.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. lxxxv) The Evangelist does not deprive the woman of this praise, nor leaves out from shame, that they had the news first from her. As soon as they hear it, they hasten to the sepulchre.

THEOPHYLACT. But how came they to the sepulchre, while the soldiers were guarding it? an easy question to answer. After our Lord's resurrection and the earthquake, and the appearance of the angel at the sepulchre, the guards withdrew, and told the Pharisees what had happened.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. cxx) After saying, came to the sepulchre, he goes back and tells us how they came: So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre; meaning himself, but he always speaks of himself, as if he were speaking of another person.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. lxxxv) On coming he sees the linen clothes set aside: And he slooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying. But he makes no further search: yet went he not in. Peter on the other hand, being of a more fervid temper, pursued the search, and examined every thing: Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, and the napkin, that was about His head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. Which circumstances were proof of His resurrection. For had they carried Him away, they would not have stripped Him; nor, if any had stolen Him, would they have taken the trouble to wrap up the napkin, and put it in a place by itself, apart from the linen clothes; but would have taken away the body as it was. John mentioned the myrrh first of all, for this reason, i. e. to shew you that He could not have been stolen away. For myrrh would make the linen adhere to the body, and so caused trouble to the thieves, and they would never have been so senseless as to have taken this unnecessary pains about the matter. After Peter however, John entered: Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed.

AUGUSTINE. (Tract. cxxii) i. e. That Jesus had risen again, some think: but what follows contradicts this notion. He saw the sepulchre empty, and believed what the woman had said: For as yet they knew not the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. If he did not yet know that He must rise again from the dead, he could not believe that He had risen. They had heard as much indeed from our Lord, and very openly, but they were so accustomed to hear parables from Him, that they took this for a parable, and thought He meant something else.

THEOPHYLACT. Or thus: Peter is practical and prompt, John contemplative and intelligent, and learned in divine things. Now the contemplative man is generally beforehand in knowledge and intelligence, but the practical by his fervour and activity gets the advance of the other's perception, and sees first into the divine mystery.

10. Then the disciples went away again unto their own home.

11. But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre,

12. And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.

13. And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.

14. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus.

15. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.

16. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned, herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.

17. Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.

18. Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. cxxi. 1) i. e. To the place where they were lodging, and from which they had ran to the sepulchre. But though the men returned, the stronger love of the woman fixed her to the spot. But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping.

AUGUSTINE. (de Con. Ev. iii. xxiv. 69) i. e. Outside of the place where the stone sepulchre was, but yet within the garden.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. lxxxvi) Be not astonished that Mary wept for love at the sepulchre, and Peter did not; for the female sex is naturally tender, and inclined to weep.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. cxxi. 1) The eyes then which had sought our Lord, and found Him not, now wept without interruption; more for grief that our Lord had been removed, than for His death upon the cross. For now even all memorial of Him was taken away.

AUGUSTINE. (de Con. Ev. iii. xxiv. 69) She then saw, with the other women, the Angel sitting on the right, on the stone which had been rolled away from the sepulchre, at whose words it was that she looked into the sepulchre. (Mat. 28:5.)

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. lxxxvi) The sight of the sepulchre itself was some consolation. Nay, behold her, to console herself still more, stooping down, to see the very place where the body lay: And as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. cxxi) In her too great grief she could believe neither her own eyes, nor the disciples'. Or was it a divine impulse which caused her to look in?

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. lxxxvi. 1) As her understanding was not so raised as to be able to gather from the napkins the fact of the resurrection, she is given the sight of Angels in bright apparel, who sooth her sorrow.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. cxxi) But why did one sit at the head, the other at the feet? To signify that the glad tidings of Christ's Gospel was to be delivered from the head to the feet, from the beginning to the end. The Greek word Angel means one who delivers news.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. lxxxvi) The Angels who appear say nothing about the resurrection; but by degrees the subject is entered on. First of all they address her compassionately, to prevent her from being overpowered by a spectacle of such extraordinary brightness: And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? The Angels forbid tears, and announced, as it were, the joy that was at hand: Why weepest thou? As if to say, Weep not.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. cxxi) But she, thinking that they wanted to know why she wept, tells them the reason: She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord. The lifeless body of her Lord, she calls her Lord, putting the part for the whole; just as we confess that Jesus Christ the Son of God was buried, when only His flesh was buried. And I know not where they have placed Him: it was a still greater grief, that she did not know where to go to console her grief.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. lxxxvi) As yet she knew nothing of the resurrection, but thought the body had been taken away.

AUGUSTINE. (de Con. Evang. iii. xxiv) Here the Angels must be understood to rise up, for Luke describes them as seen standing.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. cxxi) The hour was now come, which the Angels announced, when sorrow should be succeeded by joy: And when she had thus said, she turned herself back.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. l) But why, when she is talking to the Angels, and before she has heard any thing from them, does she turn back? It seems to me that while she was speaking, Christ appeared behind her, and that the Angels by their posture, look, and motion, shewed that they saw our Lord, and that thus it was that she turned back.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. lxxxvi) To the Angels He appeared as their Lord, but not so to the woman, for the sight coming upon her all at once, would have stupified her. She was not to be lifted suddenly, but gradually to high things.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. lxxxvi 1) Because He appeared as a common person, she thought Him the gardener: She, supposing Him to be the gardener, saith unto Him, Sir, if Thou have borne Him hence, tell me where Thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away. i. e. If thou hast taken Him away from fear of the Jews, tell me, and I will take Him again.

THEOPHYLACT. She was afraid that the Jews might vent their rage even on the lifeless body, and therefore wished to remove it to some secret place.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. lxxxvi. 1) Just as He was sometimes in the midst of the Jews, and they did not know Him till He pleased to make Himself known. But why does she turn herself, when she had turned herself before? It seems to me that when she said, Where thou hast laid Him, she turned to the Angels, to ask why they were astonished. Then Christ, calling her, discovered Himself by His voice, and made her turn to Him again.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. cxxi) Or she first turned her body, but thought Him what He was not; now she was turned in heart, and knew who He was. Let no one however blame her, because she called the gardener, Lord, and Jesus, Master. The one was a title of courtesy to a person from whom she was asking a favour; the other of respect to a Teacher from whom she was used to learn to distinguish the divine from the human.

The word Lord is used in different senses, when she says, They have taken away my Lord, and when she says, Lord, if Thou have borne Him away.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. cxxi. 3) But if standing upon the earth, He is not touched, how shall He be touched sitting in heaven? And did He not before His ascension offer Himself to the touch of the disciples: Handle Me and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones? (Luke 24:39) Who can be so absurd as to suppose that He was willing that disciples should touch Him before He ascended to His Father, and unwilling that women should till after? Nay, we read of women after the resurrection, and before He ascended to His Father, touching Him, one of whom was Mary Magdalene herself, according to Matthew. Either then Mary here is a type of the Gentile Church, which did not believe in Christ till after His ascension: or the meaning is that Jesus is to be believed in, i. e. spiritually touched, in no other way, but as being one with the Father. He ascends to the Father mystically, as it were, in the mind of him who hath so far advanced as to acknowledge that He is equal to the Father. But how could Mary believe in Him otherwise than carnally, when she wept for Him as a man?

AUGUSTINE. (i. de Trin) Touch is as it were the end of knowledge<sup>1</sup>; and He was unwilling that a soul intent upon Him should have its end, in thinking Him only what He seemed to be.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. lxxxvi. 2) Mary wished to be as familiar with Christ now, as she was before His Passion; forgetting, in her joy, that His body was made much more holy by its resurrection. So, Touch Me not, He says, to remind her of this, and make her feel awe in talking with Him. For which reason too He no longer keeps company with His disciples, viz. that they might look upon Him with the greater awe. Again, by saying I have not yet ascended, He shews that He is hastening there. And He who was going to depart and live no more with men, ought not to be regarded with the same feeling that He was before: But go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God.

HILARY. (de Trin.) Heretics, among their other impieties, misinterpret these words of our Lord's, and say, that if His Father is their Father, His God their God, He cannot be God Himself. But though He remained in the form of God, He took upon Him the form of a servant; and Christ says this in the form of a servant to men. And we cannot doubt that in so far as He is man, the Father is His Father in the same sense in which He is of other men, and God His God in like manner. Indeed He begins with saying, Go to My brethren. But God can only have brethren according to the flesh; the Only-Begotten God, being Only-Begotten, is without brethren.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. cxxi) He does not say, Our Father, but, My Father and your Father: Mine therefore and yours in a different sense; Mine by nature, yours by grace. Nor does He say, Our God, but, My God—under Him I am man—and your God; between you and Him I am Mediator.

AUGUSTINE. (de Con. Evang. iii. xxiv. 69) She then went away from the sepulchre, i. e. from that part of the garden before the rock which had been hollowed out, and with her the other women. But these, according to Mark, were seized with trembling and amazement, and said nothing to any man: Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things unto her.

AUGUSTINE. (de Con. Evang. iii. 25) While she was going with the other women, according to Matthew, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. (Matt 28:9) So we gather that there were two visions of Angels; and that our Lord too was seen twice, once when Mary took Him for the gardener, and again, when He met them by the way, and by this repeating His presence confirmed their faith. And so Mary Magdalen came and told the disciples, not alone, but with the other women whom Luke mentions.

### **From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:**

#### **20:1 Early on the First Day of the Week**

##### **The Lord's Day.**

Augustine: The first of the week is what Christian practice now calls the Lord's day, because of the resurrection of the Lord. Tractates on the Gospel of John 120.6.

##### **The Womb and the Tomb.**

Chrysostom: How can I recount for you these hidden realities or proclaim what goes beyond any word or concept? How can I lay open before you the mystery of the Lord's resurrection, the saving sign of his cross and of his three days' death? For each and every event that happened to our Savior is an outward sign of the mystery of our redemption. Just as Christ was born from his mother's inviolate virginal womb, so too he rose again from the closed tomb. As he, the only-begotten Son of God was made the firstborn of his mother, so, by his resurrection, he became the firstborn from the dead. His birth did not break the seal of



his mother's virginal integrity. Nor did his rising from the dead break the seals on the sepulcher. And so, just as I cannot fully express his birth in words, neither can I wholly encompass his going forth from the tomb. Homily on Holy Saturday 10.

### **The Womb of the Earth Gives Birth.**

Hesychius of Jerusalem: Hidden first in a womb of flesh, he sanctified human birth by his own birth. Hidden afterward in the womb of the earth, he gave life to the dead by his resurrection. Suffering, pain and sighs have now fled away. For who has known the mind of God, or who has been his counselor if not the Word made flesh who was nailed to the cross, who rose from the dead and who was taken up into heaven? This day brings a message of joy: it is the day of the Lord's resurrection when, with himself, he raised up the race of Adam. Born for the sake of human beings, he rose from the dead with them. On this day paradise is opened by the risen one, Adam is restored to life and Eve is consoled. On this day the divine call is heard, the kingdom is prepared, we are saved and Christ is adored. On this day, when he had trampled death under foot, made the tyrant a prisoner and despoiled the underworld, Christ ascended into heaven as a king in victory, as a ruler in glory, as an invincible charioteer. He said to the Father, "Here am I, O God, with the children you have given me." And he heard the Father's reply, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool." To him be glory, now and for ever, through endless ages. Amen. Easter Homily 5-6.

### **No Exact Time Recorded of When Jesus Arose.**

Dionysius of Alexandria: No very exact account seems to be offered in the Scriptures of the hour at which Jesus rose. For the Evangelists have given different descriptions of the parties who came to the sepulcher one after another, and all have declared that they found the Lord risen already. It was "in the end of the sabbath," as Matthew has said. It was "early, when it was yet dark," as John writes. It was "very early in the morning," as Luke puts it. And it was "very early in the morning, at the rising of the sun," as Mark tells us. And so, no one has shown us clearly the exact time when he rose. It is admitted, however, that those who came to the sepulcher in the end of the sabbath found him no longer lying in it, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week. And let us not suppose that the Evangelists disagree or contradict each other. But even though there may seem to be some small difficulty as to the subject of our inquiry, if they all agree that the light of the world, our Lord, rose on that one night, while they differ with respect to the hour, we may well seek with wise and faithful mind to harmonize their statements. Fragment 5.1.

### **The Evangelists Agree It Was the Dead of Night.**

Cyril of Alexandria: No one, I suppose, will imagine that the inspired writers disagree or that they fix the time of the resurrection differently. But anyone who chooses to investigate the meaning of the indications they give of the time will find that their accounts add up. For early dawn and late night fix the same point of time, that is, the very dead of night, so to say. There is, therefore, no discrepancy between them. For the one, taking as his starting point the end of night, and the other the beginning, both reach the middle watch and meet at the same point, that is, as I just now said, the dead of night. Commentary on the Gospel of John 12.

### **Mary Comes Looking for Consolation.**

Chrysostom: For he arose while both stone and seals lay over him. But because it was necessary that others should be fully satisfied, the tomb was opened after the resurrection and what had happened was confirmed. This then was what startled Mary. For being entirely full of loving affection toward her Master, when the sabbath was past, she could not bear to rest but came very early in the morning, desiring to find some consolation from the place. Homilies on the Gospel of John 85.4.

### **All the Women Were with Mary.**

Augustine: It was in the early morning of the first day of the week that the women came to the sepulcher, as all the Evangelists are at one in attesting. By that time, all that is recorded by Matthew alone had already taken place, that is to say, in regard to the quaking of the earth, and the rolling away of the stone and the terror of the guards who were so frightened that they lay there like dead men. Then, as John informs us, Mary Magdalene came. She was unquestionably more ardent in her love than these other women who had ministered to the Lord. And so, it was not unreasonable in John to only mention her, leaving the other women unnamed who, however, were with her, as we gather from the reports given by other Evangelists. Harmony of the Gospels 3.24.69.

## **20:2 Mary's Report**

### **Women Favored in Mary As First Witness.**

Chrysostom: Do you see how she did not yet know anything clearly concerning the resurrection? Instead, she thought the body had been removed, which is what she simply tells to the disciples. And the Evangelist has not deprived the woman of such praise, nor did he think it shameful that they should have learned these things first from her who had passed the night in watching. This shows how his love of the truth is on display everywhere. Homilies on the Gospel of John 85.4.

### **"They Have Taken My Lord."**

Augustine: Some of the Greek codices have, "They have taken my Lord," which may likely enough have been said by someone with a stronger than ordinary affection of love than simply that of a relationship of a handmaid. However, we have not found it in the several codices to which we have had access. Tractates on the Gospel of John 120.6.

### **Mary's Ardor of Faith.**

Cyril of Alexandria: This excellent and pious woman would never have endured remaining at home and leaving the sepulcher [after the burial] if she had not had respect for sabbath law and the penalty that was incurred by those who transgressed it. This fear curbed her excessive zeal, allowing ancient custom to prevail, and to withdraw her thoughts from the object of her most earnest longings for awhile. But when the sabbath was already past and the dawn of the next day was appearing, she hurried back to the spot. And then, when she saw the stone rolled away from the mouth of the tomb, well-grounded suspicions seized her mind and, calling to mind the ceaseless hatred of the Jews, she thought that Jesus had been carried away. And so she accuses them of this crime in addition to their other misdeeds. While she was thus engaged and mulling over the possibilities in her mind, the woman returned to the men who loved the Lord, anxious to obtain the cooperation of the most intimate of his disciples in her quest. And so deep-rooted and impregnable was her faith that she thought no less of Christ because of his death on the cross but even when he was dead called him Lord, as she had always done, thereby showing a truly God-loving spirit. Commentary on the Gospel of John 12.

## **20:3–4 Peter and John’s Race to the Tomb**

### **Along with Peter and John.**

Gregory of Nazianzus:

Be a Peter or a John;

Hasten to the sepulcher,

Running together,

Running against one another,

Vying in the noble race.

And even if you are beaten in speed,

Win the victory of showing who wants it more—

Not just looking into the tomb, but going in.

On Holy Easter, Oration 45.24.

## **20:5–7 Detail of the Linens and Tomb**

### **Neatness of Linens Proves No Theft.**

Chrysostom: When [Mary] came and said these things, the apostles heard them and drew near to the sepulcher with great eagerness. They see the linen clothes lying there, which was a sign of the resurrection. For if they had removed the body, they would not have stripped it first, nor, if any had stolen it, would they have taken the trouble to remove the napkin and roll it up and lay it in a place by itself apart from the linens. They would have taken the body as it was. Therefore, John tells us by anticipation that it was buried with much myrrh, which glues linen to the body not less firmly than lead. He tells us this so that when you hear that the napkin lay apart from the linens, you may not endure those who say that he

was stolen. For a thief would not have been so foolish as to expend so much effort on a trifling detail. Homilies on the Gospel of John 85.4.

### **20:8–9 What Did John Believe?**

#### **John Believed Mary's Report.**

Augustine: Here some, by not giving due attention, suppose that John believed that Jesus had risen again. But there is no indication of this from the words that follow. For what does he mean by immediately adding, "For as yet they knew not the Scripture, that he must rise again from the dead"? He could not then have believed that Jesus had risen again when he did not know that he had to rise again. What then did he see? What was it that he believed? It was nothing else but this, that is, that he saw the sepulcher empty and believed what the woman had said, that is, that Jesus had been taken away from the tomb. "For as yet they knew not the Scripture, that he must rise again from the dead." In the same way also, when they heard of it from the Lord himself—although uttered in the plainest of terms—yet from their custom of hearing him speaking by parables they did not understand and believed that he meant something else. Tractates on the Gospel of John 120.9.

#### **Peter and John Testify to the Resurrection.**

Cyril of Alexandria: When these men (I mean Peter and John, the writer of this book, for he gives himself the name of the other disciple) heard this news from the woman's mouth, they ran with all the speed they could and hurried to the sepulcher. They saw the marvel with their own eyes, being in themselves competent to testify to the event, for they were two in number as the Law enjoined. As yet they did not meet Christ risen from the dead, but they infer his resurrection from the bundle of linen clothes, and from that time on they believed that he had burst the bonds of death, as holy Scripture had long ago proclaimed that he would do. When, therefore, they looked at the issues of events in the light of the prophecies that turned out true, their faith was from that time forward rooted on a firm foundation. Commentary on the Gospel of John 12.

## **20:10 The Disciples Return Home**

### **The Disciples Go Home, Mary Stays.**

Chrysostom: As a woman, Mary was full of feeling and more inclined to pity. I say this in case you might wonder how it was that Mary wept bitterly at the tomb, while Peter was in no way affected. For “the disciples,” it says, “went away to their own home.” But she stood shedding tears. This was because hers was a tender nature, and she as yet did not have an accurate account of the resurrection. They ... saw the linen clothes and believed and then left for their own homes in astonishment. And why didn’t they immediately go to Galilee as they were commanded to do before the passion? They waited for the others, perhaps, and besides they were yet at the height of their amazement. These then went their way, but she remained there. Homilies on the Gospel of John 86.1.

### **The Disciples Avoid Unnecessary Risk.**

Cyril of Alexandria: The wise disciples, after having gathered sufficiently satisfactory evidence of the resurrection of our Savior, were unsure, as it were, what to do with their confirmed and unshaken faith. Comparing the events as they had actually occurred with the prophecies of holy Scripture, they went back home and most likely hurried to see their fellow workers to recount the miracle and afterward consider what course should be pursued. They may have also had another motive in doing what they did. For the passion of the Jews was at its height, and the rulers were thirsting eagerly for the blood of every person who marveled at the teaching of the Savior and confessed his divine and ineffable power and glory. But most of all they thirsted for the blood of the holy disciples themselves, who then had good reason for shrinking from an encounter with them. This is why they left the sepulcher before it was quite light, since they could not have done so without risk if they were seen leaving in the daytime—the sun’s rays revealing them to everyone. We are far from saying that they were cowards as a reason for their cautious flight. Rather, it is more likely that the knowledge of what was expedient for them was instilled in the minds of the saints by Christ who did not permit these who were destined to be lights and teachers of the world to run unnecessary risks. Commentary on the Gospel of John 12.

## **20:11 Mary Stays**

### **Why Does Mary Take a Second Look?**

Augustine: What then does it mean, that, as she wept, she stooped down and looked again into the sepulcher? Was it because her grief was so excessive that she hardly thought she could believe either their eyes or her own? Or was it rather by some divine impulse that her mind led her to look within? Tractates on the Gospel of John 121.1.

## **20:12 Two Angels in White**

### **From Beginning to End.**

Augustine: Why is it that one was sitting at the head and the other at the feet? Was it because those who in Greek are called angels are in Latin newsbearers [nuntii]? In this way they signified that the gospel of Christ was to be preached from head to foot, from the beginning even to the end? Tractates on the Gospel of John 121.1.

## **20:13 Mary's Sorrow at Losing Her Lord**

### **Angels Initially Silent About the Resurrection.**

Chrysostom: The angels who appear say nothing about the resurrection. But by degrees the subject is entered on. First of all they address her compassionately, to prevent her from being overpowered by a spectacle of such extraordinary brightness. And they say to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" Homilies on the Gospel of John 86.1.

### **No Occasion for Tears.**

Cyril of Alexandria: Observe that the tears shed for Christ do not lose their reward, nor is it long before love for him bears fruit. Rather, his grace and rich restitution will follow closely in the wake of pain. Notice how—as Mary was sitting there, her cheeks bedewed with mourning for her beloved Lord whom she had lost—notice how the Savior granted to her the knowledge of the mystery about him through the mouth of holy angels. They tell her to stop crying because this was no occasion for tears. She was making a subject for rejoicing a cause of grief. Why, indeed, they say, when death has been subdued, and corruption has

lost its power and our Savior Christ has risen again and made a new pathway for the dead back to incorruption and to life—why would you misunderstand what is going on now? Why are you so distraught with pain when what is actually going on calls for rejoicing? You should be glad, even ecstatic! And so, why then are you crying and, in effect detracting from the honor due to what amounts to a celebration? Commentary on the Gospel of John 12.

### **Mary's Love Foretold in the Song of Songs.**

Rufinus of Aquileia: This was foretold in the Song of Songs: “On my bed I sought the one my soul loves. I sought him in the night and did not find him.” Of those also who found him and held him by the feet, it is foretold, in the same book, “I will hold the one my soul loves and will not let him go.” Commentary on the Apostles’ Creed 30.

### **Jesus’ Body Is Called Lord.**

Gregory of Nyssa: His body too is called “the Lord” on account of the inherent Godhead. Letter 17.

### **Mary Calls Jesus’ Inanimate Body “Her Lord.”**

Augustine: Mary calls her Lord’s inanimate body her Lord, meaning a part for the whole. It is the same as when all of us acknowledge that Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, our Lord, who of course is at once both the Word and soul and flesh, was nevertheless crucified and buried, while it was only his flesh that was laid in the sepulcher. Tractates on the Gospel of John 121.1.

### **20:14 Mary Turns but Does Not Recognize Jesus**

#### **Jesus Does Not Want His Appearance to Overwhelm Mary.**

Chrysostom: But why, after speaking with the angels and not having yet heard anything from them, did Mary turn back? I think that while she was speaking, Christ suddenly appeared behind her and struck the angels with awe. And when they saw their ruler, they showed immediately by their attitude, their gaze and their movements that they saw the Lord. This is what drew the woman’s attention and caused her to turn around. This is how he appeared to them, but this is not how he appeared to the woman in order not to terrify her at the first sight of him. Rather, he appears to her in a more humble and ordinary form, as is clear from her reaction, supposing that he was the gardener. It was appropriate to lead one of so lowly a



mind to higher matters not all at once but gently. He therefore in turn asks her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?” Homilies on the Gospel of John 86.1.

### **Mary’s Eyes Closed to the Resurrection.**

Jerome: Was he one person when he was not known and another when he was known? He was surely one and the same. Whether, therefore, they knew him or not depended on their sight. It did not depend on him who was seen. And yet, it did depend on him in this sense, that he held their eyes so that they might not know him. And finally, in order that you may see that the mistake that held them was not to be attributed to the Lord’s body but to the fact that their eyes were closed, we are told, “Their eyes were opened, and they knew him.” This is why, as long as Mary Magdalene did not recognize Jesus and sought the living among the dead, she thought he was the gardener. Afterward she recognized him, and then she called him Lord. Against John of Jerusalem 35.

### **20:15 Jesus Speaks to Mary**

#### **Along with Mary Magdalene.**

Gregory of Nazianzus: Be the first to see the stone taken away, and perhaps you will see the angels and Jesus himself. Say something. Hear his voice. If he says to you, “Do not touch me,” stand far away. Reverence the Word, but do not grieve because he knows those to whom he appears first. On Holy Easter, Oration 45.24.

#### **The Gardener of Paradise.**

Jerome: When Mary Magdalene had seen the Lord and thought that he was the gardener ... she was mistaken, indeed, in her vision, but the very error had its prototype. Truly, indeed, Jesus was the gardener of his paradise, of his trees of paradise. “She thought that he was the gardener” and wanted to fall at his feet. What does the Lord say to her? “Do not touch me, for I have not yet ascended to my Father.” Do not touch me. You do not deserve to touch the one you looked for in a grave. Do not touch me whom you only suppose, but do not believe, has arisen. Do not touch me, for to you I have not yet ascended to my Father. When you believe that I have ascended to my Father, then, it will be your privilege to touch me. Homily 87, On John 1.1–14.

## **20:16 Rabboni**

### **Sir and Master.**

Augustine: Let no one think bad of the woman because she called the gardener “sir” (domine) and Jesus “Master” (magistrum).... In the first instance she was honoring a person from whom she was asking a favor. In the second she was recalling the teacher from whom she was learning to distinguish the divine from the human. She called one lord (sir) even when she was not his servant so that through him she could come to the Lord whose [servant] she was. She used the word lord in one sense when she said “They have taken away my Lord,” and in another sense when she said, “Sir [i.e., lord], if you have carried him away.” Tractates on the Gospel of John 121.2.

### **Mary Recognizes the Voice of Her Shepherd.**

Romanus Melodus:

He who searches the hearts

And grabs them by the reins,

Knowing that Mary would recognize his voice,

Like a shepherd, called his crying lamb,

Saying, “Mary.”

She at once recognized him and spoke:

“Surely my good shepherd calls me

In order that from this time forward he may number me among the ninety nine lambs;

For I see behind the one who is calling me

The bodies of the saints, the ranks of the just,

Therefore, then, I do not say,

'Who are you who calls me?'

For I clearly know who it is who is calling me;

It is he, as he said ahead of time, My Lord, he

Who offers resurrection to the fallen."

Kontakion on the Resurrection 40.10.

### **Mary Wants to Hold to the Divine, but Also to Learn.**

Severus of Antioch: Some indeed say that because this woman approached him and touched him just as she had done before, without thinking anything of it, that she did not believe that this act of resurrection was worthy of the glorious and sublime divinity. Rather [they say] she still thought the same as she did earlier, that he would be characterized by his humility and humanity as when he was with his disciples. And so when our Savior asks why she is acting this way, as if he was still earthbound, because he had not yet ascended to his Father, it is as if he said, Do not touch me with too much curiosity.... Perhaps indeed he also knew that every fiber of her being wanted to hold on to these divine feet with joy and emotion as a friend of God because Matthew also records others, besides Mary, who seized his feet and adored him. But others say that he was raising her to a higher and more sublime way of thinking. Because [they say] when Mary approached him with more fervent desire and to ask something concerning the divine, she did so because she wanted the reason for his resurrection revealed to her and so she returned to touch him.... And so Jesus, as one who knows the hidden things of the heart, says to her, "Do not touch me, because I have not yet ascended to my Father." [He says this] because he had promised to his disciples, once he had ascended into heaven, that the Holy Spirit would come who would lead them to perfection by teaching and revealing to them what was hidden.... Then [i.e., at that time] he had said, "I still have many things to teach you but you cannot bear them now, but when the Spirit of truth comes, he will lead you into all truth." This is why [now] he says, "Do not touch me," that is, do not probe, do not seek the reason for what you came to ask. Do not touch me. The time has not yet come because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But I will ascend, and when I do, the Spirit will come and teach you as he also promised to me. It is obvious that Mary, [once she recognized him], wanted to learn, because she

addressed him not as “Lord” [as she had done earlier] but as “Rabboni,” that is, teacher.... She was anxious to learn. But, as one who directs his words with understanding to teach, Jesus deflects her [question] as being inappropriate.... [The Gospel] testifies to this desire of Mary, the sister of Martha, to know when, instead of listening to Martha’s instruction, she should remain close to Jesus, who said concerning her, “Mary has chosen the better share, which will not be taken away from her.” Cathedral Homilies 45.

## **20:17a Do Not Hold Me**

### **Purification Needed After Battle.**

Origen: But after he had destroyed his enemies through his passion, the Lord, who is mighty in battle and strong, required a purification that could be given to him by his Father alone. And this is why he forbids Mary to touch him. Commentary on the Gospel of John 6.287.

### **Perfection of the Resurrection Comes with the Father.**

Origen: It belongs to the resurrection that one should be on the first day in the paradise of God, and it belongs to the resurrection when Jesus appears and says, “Do not touch me. For I am not yet ascended to my Father,” but the perfection of the resurrection was when he came to the Father. Commentary on the Gospel of John 10.245.

### **The Relationship Has Changed.**

Chrysostom: Some assert that she asked for spiritual grace because she had heard him say to the disciples, “If I go to the Father, ‘I will ask him, and he shall give you another Comforter.’ ” But how could she who was not present with the disciples have heard this? Besides, such an interpretation is far from the meaning here. And how should she ask such a thing when he had not yet gone to the Father? What, then, does it mean? I think that she still wanted to talk with Jesus like she used to and that in her joy she perceived nothing out of the ordinary in him, although he had become far more excellent in bodily appearance. To lead her therefore from this idea, and so that she might speak to him with more awe (for he no longer appears so familiar with the disciples either), he raises her thoughts so that she is more reverent toward him. To have said, “Do not approach me as you did before, for matters are not in the same state, nor shall I any longer be with you in the same way” would have been harsh and high-sounding. But by saying, “I am not yet ascended to the Father,” it was not as painful to hear, although he was basically saying the same

thing. For by saying, "I am not yet ascended," he shows that he is hurrying and pressing on. He was saying that it was not right for one about to leave for [heaven] and who would no longer converse with human beings to be looked on with the same feelings as before. Homilies on the Gospel of John 86.2.

### **Approaching the King.**

Ephrem the Syrian: He said, "Do not touch me," first of all, because this body was [like] a first-flowering fruit from Sheol that our Lord, as priest, was preserving carefully from contact with any [human] hand, so as to offer it to the [only] hand capable of receiving such a gift and capable of paying the price for an offering such as this. Second, [he did not want anyone to touch him] in order to show that this body was [already] glorified and magnified. Thus he showed them that, while he had been a servant, everyone had power over him, since even tax collectors and sinners used to come and touch him. But when he was made Lord, fear of him was over everyone like [the fear of] God. Even kings and nobles convince us [of this], for those who see [them] are afraid to touch them. Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron 21.26.

### **Touch Christ by Faith.**

Augustine: What does this mean, "Do not touch me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father"? If she could not touch him as he was standing on earth, would she be able to touch him seated in heaven? As though he was saying, "Do not touch me now; touch me then, when I have ascended to the Father." Your graces will recall yesterday's reading, when the Lord appeared to the disciples and they thought they were seeing a spirit. But wishing to relieve them of this mistaken idea, he offered himself to their touch. What did he say? It was yesterday. There was a sermon about it. "Why are you troubled, and why are thoughts coming up into your hearts? See my hands and my feet; feel and see." He had not already ascended to the Father, had he, when he said feel and see, offering himself to his disciples to be touched, not just touched but felt, to produce faith in the real flesh of his real body, to present the solid reality of truth even to the human touch? So he offers himself to the hands of the disciples to be felt, but he says to the woman, "Do not touch me, for I have not yet ascended to my Father." What can it mean? Could men only touch him on earth, while women had to touch him in heaven, "for I have not yet ascended to my Father"?

So what can touching be, but believing? We touch Christ, you see, by faith, and it is better not to touch him with the hand and to touch him with faith than to feel him with the hand and not touch him with faith. It was not a great matter to touch Christ; the Jews touched him when they seized him, they touched him when they bound him, touched him when they hung him up; they touched him, and by touching him

in a bad way, they lost what they touched. Just you touch by faith, O Catholic church; see that you touch by faith. If you have thought of Christ only as a man, you have touched him on earth. If you have believed Christ is Lord, equal to the Father, then you have touched him when he has ascended to the Father. Sermon 246.4.

### **Touch Me As God.**

Augustine:

What is "Touch me as I ascended to the Father"?

Touch me as equal to the Father.

What is "Touch me as equal to the Father"?

Touch me as God, that is believe in me as God.

Sermon 375c.4.

### **20:17b I Have Not Yet Ascended to the Father**

#### **Move Beyond the Human to the Divine.**

Romanus Melodus:

Carried away by the warmth of her affection and by her fervent love,

The maiden hurried, wanting to take hold of him,

Who is not containable, who fills all creation.

But the Creator did not fault her eagerness;

Instead, he elevated her to the divine, saying,

"Do not touch me; or do you consider me merely mortal?"

I am God, do not touch me.

O holy woman, lift up your eyes and consider the heavens;

Seek me there,

For I am ascending to my Father,

Whom I have not left.

For I exist simultaneously with him

And share the same throne and honor with him, I

Who offer resurrection to the fallen.”

Kontakion on the Resurrection 40.11.

### **Formerly Estranged, We Become Children.**

Gregory of Nyssa: Now that the words addressed to Mary are not applicable to the Godhead of the Only Begotten, one may learn from the intention with which they were uttered. For he who humbled himself to a level with human littleness is the one who spoke these words. ... He from whom we were formerly alienated by our revolt has become our Father and our God. Accordingly in the passage cited above the Lord brings the good news of this benefit. And the words are not a proof of the degradation of the Son but the good news of our reconciliation to God. For that which has taken place in Christ's humanity is a common boon bestowed on humankind generally. For as when we see in him the weight of the body that naturally gravitates to earth ascending through the air into the heavens, we believe according to the words of the apostle that we also "shall be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." Even so, when we hear that the true God and Father has become the God and Father of our Firstfruits, we no longer doubt that the same God has become our God and Father too, inasmuch as we have learned that we shall come to the same place where Christ has entered for us as our forerunner. Against Eunomius 12.1.

### **Holy Things for the Holy Ones.**

Cyril of Alexandria: What is the difference if he was not yet ascended to his Father? How could this reason suffice to render it improper for those that loved him to touch his holy body? Would it not be blameworthy for anyone to imagine that the Lord shrank from the pollution of the touch and said this so that he might be pure when he ascended to the Father in heaven? Would not such a person stand convicted of great foolishness and madness? For the nature of God can never be polluted. For just as the light of the sun's ray, when it strikes on a manure pile or any other earthly impurities, suffers no stain, for it remains as it is, that is, undefiled, and it partakes in no degree of the ill odor of the objects that it encounters, even so the all-holy nature of God can never admit of the blemish of defilement. Why then was Mary prevented from touching him when she drew near and yearned to do so?...

We say that the reasons for our Savior dwelling among us were many and diverse, but there is one overriding principle, indicated in his own words: "For I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." Therefore, before the saving cross and the resurrection from the dead, while as yet his providential scheme had not received its appropriate fulfillment, he mingled both with the just and the unjust, and ate with publicans and sinners and allowed any that wanted to come to him and touch his holy body so that he might sanctify all who came and call them to a knowledge of the truth and might bring back to health those who were diseased and enfeebled by the constant practice of sin. ...

At that time, by his providence, people who were still unclean and who were polluted both in mind and body were allowed without hindrance to touch the holy flesh itself of our Savior Christ and to gain every blessing from it. But after he completed the plan of our redemption, having suffered death on the cross and rising to life again, he showed that his nature was superior to death. And so, from then on, instead of granting them access, he hinders those who come to him from touching the very flesh of his holy body. In this way he gives us a type of the holy churches and the mystery concerning himself, just as also the law given by the all-wise Moses itself did when it represented the slaughter of the lamb as a figure of Christ. For "no uncircumcised person," said the Law, "shall eat thereof," meaning by uncircumcised someone who is "impure." And humanity may justly be deemed impure in its own nature. For what is the nature of a human being, as compared with God's inherent purity? We may not, therefore, while we remain uncircumcised, that is, impure, touch the holy body, but only when we have been made pure by the true circumcision of the Spirit.... As, therefore, the Holy Spirit had not yet been sent down to us, for he had not yet ascended to the Father, he repulses Mary as not yet having received the Spirit, saying, "Touch me not,



for I am not yet ascended to the Father”; that is to say, I have not yet sent down to you the Holy Spirit. And so, the type is applicable to the churches.... Therefore, also, to those who wish to partake of the blessed Eucharist, the ministers of divine mysteries say, “Holy things to the holy,” teaching that participation in holy things is the due reward of those who are sanctified in the Spirit. Commentary on the Gospel of John 12.

### **20:17c My Father, Your Father; My God, Your God**

#### **Paving the Way to Heaven.**

Ambrose: For Christ’s purpose in the incarnation was to pave for us the road to heaven. Mark how he says, “I go up to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” On the Christian Faith 3.7.50.

#### **Jesus Announces Firstfruits of Human Nature.**

Gregory of Nyssa: He becomes the firstborn of the new creation of men and women in Christ by the twofold regeneration, reborn by holy baptism and by that birth that is the consequence of the resurrection from the dead. In both alike he becomes for us the Prince of life, the firstfruits and the firstborn. This firstborn, then, also has brothers. This is who he is referring to when he says to Mary, “Go and tell my brothers, I go to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God.” In these words he sums up the whole aim of his dispensation as man. For humanity rebelled against God and “served those that by nature were no gods.” And even though they were the children of God, they became attached to an evil father falsely so called. Therefore, the mediator between God and man, having assumed the firstfruits of all human nature, sends to his brothers the announcement of himself not in his divine character but in that which he shares with us. He says, “I am departing in order to make that true Father, from whom you were separated, to be your Father; and to make that true God from whom you had rebelled to be your God. And I am doing this in my own person. For by those firstfruits that I have assumed, I am in myself presenting all humanity to its God and Father.”

Since, then, the firstfruits made the true God to be its God and the good Father to be its Father, the blessing is secured for human nature as a whole, and by means of the firstfruits the true God and Father becomes Father and God of all men and women. Now “if the firstfruits are holy, the lump also is holy.” But where the firstfruits, Christ, is—and the firstfruits is none other than Christ—there also are those who are Christ’s, as the apostle says. Against Eunomius 2.8.

### **Sonship by Nature and Sonship by Grace.**

Cyril of Jerusalem: But in case anyone, from simplicity or perverse ingenuity, should suppose that Christ is but equal in honor to righteous people ... it is well to make this distinction beforehand, that the name of the Father is one, but the power of his operation is many. And Christ himself, knowing this, has spoken unerringly, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father." He does not say, "to our Father," but distinguishing and saying first what was proper to himself, "to My Father," which was by nature. Then he adds, "and your Father," which was by adoption. For however high the privilege we have received of saying in our prayers, "Our Father," who art in heaven, yet this gift is one of loving-kindness. For we call him Father, not as having been by nature begotten of our Father who is in heaven but having been transferred from servitude to sonship by the grace of the Father, through the Son and Holy Spirit. We are permitted to speak this way because of the ineffable loving-kindness [of our Father]. Catechetical Lectures 7.7.

### **Christ's Father by Nature, Our Father by Adoption.**

Cyril of Jerusalem: The Father, having begotten the Son, remained the Father and is not changed. He begat Wisdom yet did not lose wisdom himself. He begat power yet did not become weak. He begat God but did not lose his own Godhead. Neither did he lose anything himself by diminution or change. He who was begotten does not lack anything either. Perfect is he who begat, perfect is that which was begotten: God was he who begat, God is he who was begotten; God of all himself, yet giving the Father the title as his own God. For he is not ashamed to say, "I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God." But in case you might think that he is a Father of the Son in the same way that he is Father of creation, Christ drew a distinction in what follows. For he did not say, "I ascend to our Father," lest the creatures should be made fellows of the Only Begotten. Instead, he said, "My Father and your Father." He is in one way mine, by nature. He is, in another way, yours, by adoption. And again, "to my God and your God," in one way mine, as his true and only-begotten Son, and in another way yours, as his workmanship. The Son of God then is very God, ineffably begotten before all ages. Catechetical Lectures 11.18–19.

### **Christ, in Humility, Ranks Himself with Us.**

John of Damascus: Of those passages which refer to the period after the resurrection, there are several which pertain to his human nature.... Other passages speak of Christ's dual nature, such as, "I ascend unto

my Father and your Father, and my God and your God.” “My God and your God,” is to be understood more in an abstract way, as though he were ranking himself with us. Those passages, in general, that are sublime must be assigned to the divine nature, which is superior to passion and body. And those passages that are humble must be ascribed to the human nature. And those passages that are common must be attributed to the compound being, that is, the one Christ, who is God and man. And it should be understood that both [the human and divine] belong to one and the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. For if we know what is proper to each, and perceive that both are performed by one and the same, we shall have the true faith and shall not go astray. Orthodox Faith 4.18.

### **Two Natures Must Be Distinguished.**

Gregory of Nazianzus: To give you the explanation in one sentence: You are to apply the loftier expressions to the Godhead and to that nature in him that is superior to sufferings and bodily experiences. But all that is lowly should be applied to the composite condition of him who for your sakes made himself of no reputation and was incarnate. On the Son, Theological Oration 3(29).18.

### **20:18 I Have Seen the Lord**

#### **Mary Not Alone.**

Augustine: While she was going with the other women, according to Matthew, “Jesus met them and greeted them. And they came and held him by the feet and worshiped him.” So we gather that there were two visions of angels. We also understand that our Lord too was seen twice: once when Mary took him for the gardener and again when he met them by the way. In this way, by repeating his presence, he strengthens their faith and calms their fears.... And so Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples, not alone but with the other women whom Luke mentions. Harmony of the Gospels 3.24.69.