

**Easter Sunday
April 16, 2017**

In his best-selling book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Victor Frankl describes his experiences as a prisoner in Auschwitz during the Nazi occupation. Considered to be a classic, the book tells the painful story how Frankl's fellow prisoners coped with the horrors of a concentration camp.

The question that is central to the entire book is: How are people able to maintain any sense of hope while surrounded by so much anguish and terror?

The answer Frankl gives is that people can come to a deeper appreciation of the spiritual dimension of life when all hope seems lost.

Frankl was particularly affected by a woman who knew she was going to die very soon. And yet, remarkably, she was calm, even cheerful. Frankl asked this woman how she could maintain this spirit in the light of what she knew awaited her.

Pointing through the window of her hut, she said, "This tree here is the only friend I have in my loneliness ... I often talk to this tree," he asked her if the tree replied. "Yes." What did it say to her? She answered, "It said to me, 'I am here—I am here—I am life, eternal life.'"

This woman's approach to death was crucial to the major theme of Frankl's book that even in the most horrible circumstances, even in our darkest and most troubling moments, we look intuitively for meaning, for something that gives us hope and promise. In a word, we look for Easter.

Remember the events of Jesus' passion, death and resurrection: Peter had betrayed Jesus. Jesus stood alone before Pontius Pilate. Soldiers whipped him and crowned him with thorns. The crowd cried out to crucify him. Jesus died alone on a cross. Afterwards, any flame of hope

barely flickered. Jesus' followers had gone into hiding because they were afraid they would be next.

Then something miraculous happened. Mary Magdalene comes crashing through the door where the disciples were hiding and spoke the most astonishing words ever: "I have seen the Lord!" Human history has never been the same.

Maybe even more remarkable is that Mary did not initially recognize Jesus. At the tomb, she frantically wondered where his body had been taken. With unimaginable grief, her eyes filled with tears. Then two strangers, who turned out to be angels, appeared and one said to her: "Woman, why are you weeping?"

Who cannot identify with the overwhelming power of grief upon hearing that someone we love has died? But then Jesus asked the same question: "Woman, why are you weeping?" Notice that the first words spoken by the risen Jesus were about the meaning of human tears. Jesus then spoke one more word: "Mary." It stopped her in her tracks. She recognized the sound of her name in that voice.

That was the turning point. That was the moment the Resurrection became fully evident. That was when human history was changed.

And this was also when Jesus' command to "go to my brothers" broke through. And the disciples did just that. They told the story that has been passed on to us. It's the same story that Mary Magdalene and the woman in Auschwitz had each discovered.

"I am here. There is life. Eternal life." We call it Easter.

Today's readings offer us a variety of approaches to our Easter celebration. They invite us to consider our own experience as Good News to be shared. We may know Easter faith as a slow journey from desolation to hope. It may be a vision of transformed reality that leads us to live each day from above.

It can also be like Peter's simple response in our first reading, "We knew it, saw it, and now have to proclaim it." There are many models, and ours will probably grow and change. What is essential is our daily and prayerful response to the questions: "What does Easter really mean for us and how and how does it influence the way we live our lives and make our decisions?"