

Seeing at the Tomb

An Easter Insight



by Andrew Linnell

About the Cover Image

Fra Angelico painted this fresco, the Resurrection of Christ, in 1440. Shown at the tomb are the Women who came that Easter morning to deal with the dead body. The fresco is at the Convent of San Marco, Florence. Each cell where a monk lived has a painting - they can be used for meditation to transport one back to 'participate' in the scene depicted (as shown here). This participation was seen as part of a monk's path of Christian initiation. Leonardo da Vinci would stroll in the Gardens of San Marco discussing Platonic and Christian philosophy some 25 years later.

The Rock of Easter

All was serene and calm following the tumultuous event of Friday. No one, save these three women, were around. They silently walked carrying baskets. As they neared their destination, one moaned, "Dear friends, we've wasted our time. We forgot there is a huge rock rolled in front of the tomb. How are we three women going to get to his body?"

The three stopped. They looked at each other wanting to think someone should have realized this before they got up so early and walked so far. Each thought to herself, "How could I have been so unconscious of this?"

Then, the tallest looked ahead at where the tomb had been carved into a small hillside. "Look," she cried out, "the rock has been removed!"

The three raced ahead in amazement.

What did the author mean by saying the rock had been removed? From a spiritual perspective, what does "rock" symbolize?

The story of Prometheus uses the symbol of 'rock' to which this god is chained by the command of Zeus. Before Zeus seized the throne from his father Chronos, Prometheus was a god known in mythology as a Titan. His name means, 'to think ahead' and he has a brother, Epimetheus, whose name means 'to think back, to reflect'. Because they had sided with Zeus, these two were the only Titans to survive the battle between Zeus and Chronos.

The Greek gods in these mythologies should be considered as aspects of our inner life of soul. According to the myth, humanity acquired the arts and sciences and above all, fire, inner fire through Prometheus. Zeus, as ruler of the soul life, found that this gift from Prometheus had given too much too soon to humanity. Thus, the Prometheus aspect of our human soul had to have these gifts chained to the rock, that is, to the mineral kingdom, until a future time.

Prometheus can only be freed from his chains by another impulse from within our soul, namely the impulse personified by Heracles. He must perform twelve labors, one for each sign of the zodiac. In so doing, the Heracleian soul becomes god-like. But this is still not enough. Finally, in order to be freed from the rock, we must sacrifice our animality. This is Chiron, the Centaur, who offers to be this sacrifice of the Human Soul. Now the chains can be removed.

While on the cross, a Roman soldier is asked to see if Christ Jesus is dead. He thrusts a spear into the body poking into the liver. Out flows both blood and water. It is Prometheus' liver that each day is gnawed by a vulture (or eagle in some versions).

If we ask who built the chains that held Prometheus' attention to the mineral kingdom, we receive more insights. These chains were built by the god of technology, Hephaestus. Later, Hephaestus, who was thrown off of Olympus by his own mother, Hera, was invited to return.

He, like Jesus did on Palm Sunday, elected to ride into the Olympian city on a donkey. These Greek myths foretold the story that Christ Jesus would fulfill in later times.

Now we can answer what Christ meant in his words to Peter, "Upon this rock I build my church." We can come to feel the Easter festival when we can first realize how we are chained to the rock, how our sense of ego, of who I am, is embedded in our intellect that lies in the tomb that is our body and whose entrance is blocked by the hugeness of the mineral kingdom. But then, with an inner Heracleian effort, we can roll away the rock to step out of our tomb.

The Rock has been Rolled Away

John's Gospel was revered by early Christian fathers and mystics alike. Not only is its structure deeply esoteric, so is each scene. Let us examine one such scene from Chapter 20, the Easter scene.



Figure 1 Descent from the Cross, Rubens, 1613

The chapter begins with Mary Magdalene coming, "on the first day of the week", that is, Sunday, to the tomb where the body of Jesus Christ had been laid. Only Mary Magdalene is mentioned in John 20, but this does not exclude the other women from accompanying her. She approaches the tomb at dawn. This tomb was owned by Joseph of Arimathea. It was Joseph who had asked Pilate for the dead body. When he took the body down from the cross, Joseph was accompanied by Nicodemus as secret disciples. They prepared the body according to Jewish customs and placed it in the tomb. This all was accomplished before sunset on Friday as, in these times, the new day began with the day's darkness. At dusk, Day 1 ended. The Jewish Sabbath began.

Although John's gospel does not state this, we learn from Mark and Matthew that Joseph had a large stone rolled to seal the

entrance to the tomb. That too happened before sundown on Friday. The next morning, Day 2, Matthew [27:62-65] writes that the Pharisees petitioned Pilate to place an armed guard at the tomb so that no one would be deceived by grave robbers that Jesus had risen from the dead as Jesus had predicated. This second day was the Sabbath when all were to "rest according to the commandment".¹ A guard was placed at the tomb.

John's gospel does tell us that when Mary arrived, she "**seeth** the stone taken away from the sepulcher." [John 20:1, KJV]. Using a Zondervan Interlinear Bible, the sentence reads "**sees** the stone having been taken out of the tomb." The verb "**sees**" is the Greek word "βλεπειν".

Here is esoteric writing indeed! The meaning can be read both from the physical reality and from the spiritual reality. The stone has been taken away! The mineral element of His body was gone. Mary at this point could only see with her physical eyes and thus could only see the mineral part of His body. But His body was not there - the stone had been taken away!

A paper by Jos Verhulst entitled *The Esoteric Content of Descent from the Cross (P.P. Rubens 1612)*² explains John 20:5-6 as a mystery. Here we find the disciple whom the Lord loved **sees** "lying flat on the ground the pieces of linen" while Peter when he looks, he

sees "the pieces of linen lying flat on the ground." Like other esoteric writers, the writer of this gospel embeds esoteric content directly into the story by using not only imagery but in this case



Figure 2 Resurrection, Matthias Grunewald, Colmar, 1515-1520

¹ Luke 23:56

² Jos Verhulst,

https://www.academia.edu/11734939/The_esoteric_content_of_The_Descent_from_the_Cross_P.P.Rubens_1612_our_ladys_cathedral_Antwerp_.Part_II_relationships_with_Johns_gospel

reversing the order. What has changed from the disciple's viewing to Peter's? Is the wording reversal just literary technique? Jos makes clear the esoteric quality herein.

John 20 describes how Peter and the disciple, upon hearing Mary say that the rock at the tomb was gone, ran to the tomb. The first to arrive was the disciple. He stood outside the tomb and peered in **seeing** (βλεπειν) "lying flat on the ground the pieces of linen". Then Peter arrived and with *a stronger will* was able to enter the tomb. This reversal, where the disciple arrived first but Peter was first to enter the tomb, is significant. Now within, Peter **sees** the same things but from a different perspective namely from within. To make this clear, the verb **to see** changes from **βλεπειν** to **θεωρει** (which is the root word for theory). My Greek Interlinear uses the verb "**beholds**" for the translation. At this moment, Peter is witnessing what appears as a reversal of the physical. This is the next higher level called prana or chi or etheric in spiritual science. It is described in these traditions as reversed in sequence from the physical, as though one should read what is written left to right in the physical, here one reads right to left.

Then the disciple also enters the tomb. In the Mystery schools, initiation put one into a death like state. At first one's perception was of the nether-world, the world of the dead. Later, through the guidance of the hierophant, the neophyte would rise into spiritual heights and be forever changed. The disciple "**saw** and believed". Here is a third verb that again is translated to "**see**"; the Greek in this case is **ειδεν**.

Now the two men leave (they "went away *to themselves*") but Mary remains. She is crying at the tomb when she "stooped into the tomb" and now comes to her spiritual awakening as she **sees** (**οραν**) "two angels in white". One angel is where the feet of Jesus had been while the other was at the head. Jos Velhurst brilliantly compares this to the image on the Shroud of Turin! Now Mary performs a reversal! She reverses her gaze to **behold** (**θεωρει**) Jesus standing there. At this point she cannot understand her perception until her own hierophant calls to awaken her to a higher consciousness by using her name. Mary's initiation is complete. She now can understand what it is she is experiencing.

This chapter closes with Thomas the Twin doubting the reports and claiming that "Unless I **see** (**ιδω**) the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." When Jesus later appears, he has Thomas touch his wounds and then says to Thomas "Because you have **seen** (**οραν**) me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not **seen** (**ιδω**) and yet have believed."

In this one chapter, we have four different verbs all translated in English to "see". Impoverished is English in this case to reveal the progression of sight, of spiritual sight in this chapter. John's Gospel moved from the sight of sensory perception to sight of the etheric realm to sight in the soul realm to finally sight of a spiritual being.

In the next chapter, John's Epilogue, we again have differentiating Greek words translated to a singular English word. In this case "love" applies to "eros", "philia", and "agape" (only the latter two appear in Chapter 21). Here Karmic redemption is instantly bestowed upon Peter for his three denials. Christ asks him "do you love me?" three times. The first two questions use the word "agape". Peter responds with "yea Lord, you know that I love (philia) you." After each answer Christ makes a request. First Christ asks him to "feed my lambs". Next Christ requests Peter "take care of my sheep." Now a third time Christ questions Peter thereby offering redemption for his third denial.

Apparently, Peter, unaware, bemoans being questioned like this. Thus, in this third question, Christ no longer uses the word "agape" but now uses "philia". Peter's reply tells the level of love his capacity of Philia, when he says " Lord, you know all things; you know that I love (philia) you." Peter cannot stretch the truth and he knows Christ knows the truth even of the level of love in



Mausoleum of Galla Placidia 1

one's soul. Peter, the rock on which Christ was to build his church, honestly knows, at this time, that Philia, love as in the lover of Sophia, the philosopher, is the heights of his capacity to love. Although the disciple whom the Lord loved was capable of agape, the world was not. So, the church must begin with Peter and must wait for a future time for a Christianity capable of Agape love. Has that time arrived?