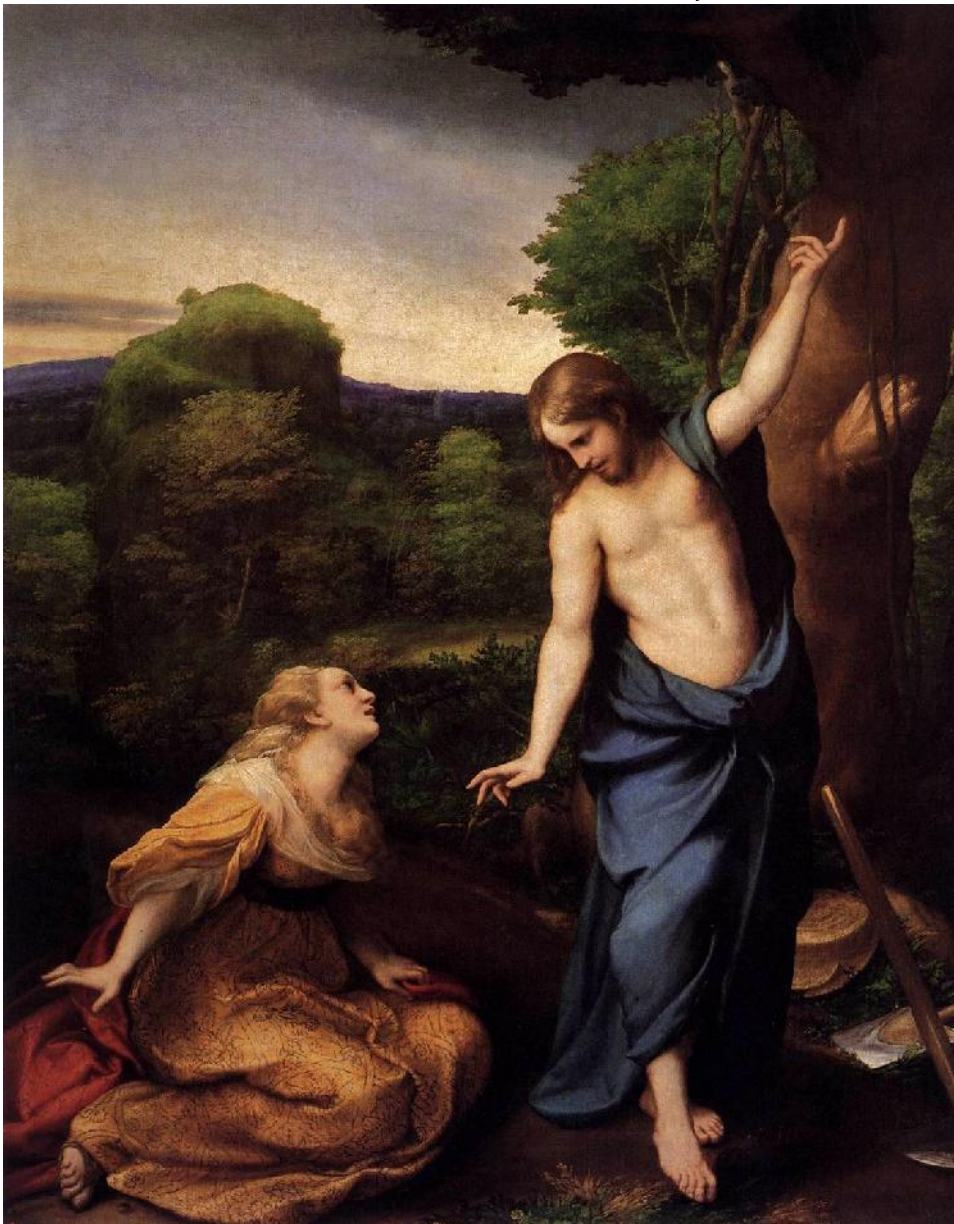


# HUMANITY RAISED:

a sermon praught by the Rev'd Dr Richard Major  
to the Anglican church in Zagreb  
(meeting at St Joseph's Chapel, in the Jesuit seminary of the Immaculate Heart of Mary),  
on Easter Day, 24<sup>th</sup> April, 2011.

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Jeremiah xxxi<sup>1-6</sup>; Psalm cxviii<sup>1-2,14-24</sup>; Colossians iii<sup>1-4</sup>; John xx<sup>1-18</sup>. From the Gospel:



*Go to My brothers and say to them, "I am ascending."*  
Alleluia! In the Name of God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost:  
Amen, alleluia, alleluia!

## The Holy Gospel

(NRSV)

**E**ARLY ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom JESUS loved, and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him.'

Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on JESUS' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that He must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of JESUS had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.' When she had said this, she turned round and saw JESUS standing there, but she did not know that it was JESUS. JESUS said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, 'Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away.' JESUS said to her, 'Mary.' She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, '*Rabbouni!*' (which means Teacher). JESUS said to her, 'Do not hold on to Me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to My brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God."'

Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that He had said these things to her.

**W**HY ARE WE HERE? What are we doing? Why are we so happy?

We're here keeping the greatest of all Christian festivals on the greatest day of the year. Every Sunday is, according to the Christian Church, a holyday, a holiday, the day in the week properly kept for feasting and being at ease. Every great holyday, like Christmas or Whitsun or the Annunciation, is meant to be even more of a blow-out. Easter is by far the greatest holyday of all, the holiest and therefore the merriest of the Church's feasts, the highest pitch of Christian merriment. Easter Sunday is the centre of the Church's life. It's natural to feast and make a holiday of it, and it's also natural for everyone to have a strong impulse to be here in Church, even if only this once in the course of the year.

But Easter isn't just the Sundayest Sunday, so to speak, the most Sunday-like of Sundays, the churchiest day of the 365. Easter Day is also about something specific, some one thing is commemorated today more than at any other time. That one thing is the Resurrection of JESUS Christ. Easter is about the Resurrection; we are here making a fuss about Easter because the Resurrection is the sort of thing worth making a unique fuss about.

And what is the Resurrection, and why ought such a fuss to be made of it?

One Friday afternoon JESUS was killed. On Friday afternoon He was absolutely dead – as thoroughly dead as you and I shall ever be. On Friday there was no question about it, He was dead; but on Sunday morning His followers were overwhelmed and struck dumb with astonishment. He was not dead after all, and could never be dead, and that death had nothing more to do with Him. For all His followers, too, and even for all humanity, death had stopped being absolutely true.

That's the sort of thing that began to be thought on that Sunday morning, twenty centuries ago, when the Resurrection was discovered. It is the best news we have ever had. It outweighs all the bad news of history. The roaring astonishment and joy of mankind over that discovery has not ceased since. No, it gets louder and more general, like boulders leaping and roaring down a mountainside, touching off vaster and vaster tumults of joy.

For the Resurrection is not something that happened once, to a certain Man, long ago. It is what all human life is now like. The Resurrection of JESUS caused and revealed everlasting life. Today it reveals and causes everlasting life. The Resurrection proves that even death has its limits and that humanity is, in the end, not going to be contained by death.

A certain woman, JESUS' greatest female disciples, Mary of Magdala, braver as usual than the men, came on *on the first day of the week, while it was still dark* – that is, on Easter Sunday morning, just before dawn. She arrived at the tomb. We heard about all this in this evening's Gospel. She did not find things as she expected. There has, it seems, been a further outrage. Grave-robbers have been about. She glances about vacantly, bemused, horrified; she peers down into the violated tomb.

What is death, where does it go? What has happened to the grave? Why has the tomb nothing more to do with JESUS? Where is His Body, and why is It wherever It is? Where is Christ?

He is everywhere. He is close behind her, murmuring her name. He is in infinity, controlling history, controlling the atoms and the suns. He is standing with Mary Magdalen in the garden – for He is a Man, still. He calls His followers, with calm affection, My brothers. *Go to My brothers*, He

tells Mary Magdalen, *and say to them, "I am ascending."* He is ascending: He has soared out of the place of the dead, out of all places, out of all times. He is now filling all space, glowing, triumphant, beyond pain and death. His brightness fills up the cosmos. His destruction of death reveals Him as God. And yet this divine man is our human Friend, too, promising us that He ascends only where we are bound to come too, to His Father – and our Father; His God – and our God. All humanity rises with Him. That's what the Resurrection is like.

That's what Easter's like. There's no festival in the year less religious than Easter, if by 'religious' you mean things exclusively to do with churches and church rules and deliberate pious observances. There's no festival in the year more delightfully human, more universal. The truth of the Resurrection, the essential truth of today's feast, is about what being human.

In the Resurrection humanity the human mind and even the human body are lifted out of the bitter dictatorship of death. All our lives we were haunted by a weakness, which increases, and a dread, which grows more intense: the weakness that comes from death, the dread that comes from the knowledge of our death. We peer down and down into the tomb, like Mary. But now, with Easter Day, comes the rumour of some total victory beyond even death.

We will, indeed, each tumble into that yawning tomb. We do not understand how we can hope to come out of it. But the fact is that we will survive it. Easter Day is the reason why. The Resurrection of Christ is why.

Now the human world is resurrected and revived. Now human experience is revealed as huger than death. Human life is bigger, and brighter, and larger, and more permanent, than we fear. It is not trivial, despite our terror that it is trivial. Life is immense and forever. A rumour of all this has reached the world: the rumour that JESUS is not dead.

And us it is more than a rumour. Whenever we come to this altar, we come just as Mary Magdalen came: sad, quite possibly, and muddled, and full of doubt. And whenever we come, we find exactly what she found: we find Christ's deathless Body waiting for us.

Where is His Body, she asked, and how is It wherever It is? It is here. We are given It to hold and to eat, so that His limitless life can pass into us.

This Easter is no rumour of a miracle two thousand years old. Easter began, at one moment, suddenly and violently. But it has never stopped. Absolute splendour has fallen, first on JESUS, then on all humanity, including – indeed, especially – on you. There is no death, no real death. It is impossible for us to die. All that lies behind us. We have been resurrected, are being resurrected, will be raised up, are doomed to ascend where Christ has gone. The resurrection is ours, and it is now.

**Christ is risen today!**  
**Alleluia! Alleluia ! Amen.**