

SERMON

Alleluia! Christ has Risen! He has Risen indeed Alleluia!

My dear beloved flock, the text for our meditation this morning is the Holy Gospel according to Saint John the twentieth chapter, verses one through eighteen.

Boys and girls, I pray that you are highly blessed this Easter morning!

When I say the word *orchestra*, what do you think of? You probably picture woodwinds, brass, and strings. Have you ever heard of an orchestra made up of kids who play instruments made out of trash? It's called the "Recycled Orchestra of Cateura" (in Paraguay). Cateura is not really a town. It's actually a slum built on a huge landfill.

Every day, about three million pounds of waste is dumped in Cateura. Many families eke out their existence by scavenging trash from the landfill to resell, and kids get pulled out of school to help. The instruments are unusual. A violin is made out of cans, wooden spoons, and bent forks. One of the ensemble's cellos uses an oil drum. Another teenager plays a saxophone made out of a

drainpipe, melted copper, coins, spoon handles, cans, and bottle caps.

Several years ago, a short video was made. The hope was to raise \$175,000 to make a full-length documentary. Not only did they raise the money, but also the video went viral. Since then, the Recycled Orchestra has performed all over the world. The group plays Mozart, Paraguayan folk music, even Frank Sinatra. Sounds pretty cool does it not? In our text for today, we seek that God makes music with misfits. How does God do that? Ponder that question as you hear the rest of the sermon. You may go back to your seats and those who love you.

The biblical orchestra is made up of the most unlikely musicians. Peter is a first-chair trumpeter. He denied Christ—three times! Paul plays the violin. But there was a time when Paul played a religious thug and persecuted Christians. And the guy on the harp? That would be David. Womanizing, bloodthirsty—yet repentant David. Today, on this Resurrection Day, we add another person to the misfits who make music. Her name is Mary—Mary Magdalene.

Mary begins as a mess. “Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out” (Luke 8:2). There are five Marys in the New Testament, which is why this one is identified with “Magdalene.” Magdalene isn’t her last name. Magdalene refers to her hometown—a little fishing village on the northwest coast of the Sea of Galilee called Magdala.

Luke tells us that Mary had been demon possessed—with seven demons, the biblical number for a complete set. Can you imagine being that messed up?

It happens just as easily to us as to Mary. Compulsion to prove. We begin a job or a task or a class with high hopes and high endeavor. “I’ll show them! I’ll be the best!” Intensity. We arrive early. We stay late. We give it *all* we’ve got. Subtle deprivations. To keep going, we begin to deprive ourselves. Maybe we stop exercising, stop getting enough sleep, or stop reading our Bible and attending church. We pick up bad eating habits. “More donuts will do the trick!” Distorted thinking. We tell ourselves, “Things will get better *after* I finish this project.” “I’ll get back on track with my family *after* tax season or *after* this business trip.”

Heightened denial. People close to us begin to see what we can't see. We have less joy in a hobby, in a sport, or in life in general. We're often tired. We begin watching too much TV.

Life becomes a checklist of things to do. One thing after another. We live for vacation, and then vacation never lasts long enough. Observable behavior changes. People who *don't* know us see that something is wrong. Our survival strategies become unhealthy: too much internet, too much eating, too much sleeping, too much shopping, too much caffeine. Depersonalization. We become robotic. We just go through the motions. We play the part, we put on a face, but we've got nothing left in the tank. *We hit rock bottom.* We internalize everything. We talk to no one. And we feel as though we've got at least seven demons.

We are not alone. Did you know that 20 percent of all people on disability are on it because of severe depression? Did you know that, despite being the richest nation on earth, the United States is, according to the World Health Organization, also the most depressed nation on earth? Did you know that in the last

decade, depression among American teenagers has increased 200 percent?

For many years, the Chevy Nova was a successful American car. But the Nova didn't sell well in Mexico. Because there was an urban myth. In Spanish the word *No va* means "no go." And this sums up life sometimes, doesn't it? *No va.* No go! We hit rock bottom with no way up. *No va.* No go. That's Mary's mess and ours as well. And music? *Music?* We have no song to sing!

Mary was down, but her Messiah had lifted her up! Jesus lifted Mary up from her pit of seven demons. That's why Mary Magdalene follows Jesus all the way to the cross to watch her Savior bleed and die.

Mary's Messiah is your Messiah too. His face is caked with spit and blood. His throat is so dry He can't swallow. His voice is so hoarse He can scarcely speak. To find the last time moisture touched His lips, we need to rewind the clock twelve hours to the meal in the Upper Room. Since drinking from the Passover cup, Jesus has been betrayed, condemned, mocked, beaten, and

crucified. No liquid has quenched His thirst. The Savior has no song to sing!

That's how things stand just before dawn on Sunday. There had been so much hope, so much promise. But now, it had all come to what? Nothing! *Nothing!* The famous Rabbi? Dead. His disciples? In hiding. Other followers? Scattered. One—Judas Iscariot—has even killed himself.

Mary Magdalene gets up early on Sunday to anoint Christ's dead body. But the body isn't in the tomb! Mary breaks out crying. She tells her story, first to Peter and John, and then to the angels, and now, for a third time, to a man she thinks is the gardener. "Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away" (John 20:15).

"Mary." The voice is unmistakable. "Mary." No one ever said her name with such tenderness. "Mary." She looks up and, in sudden recognition, cries out, "Rabboni!" It's Jesus. *It's Jesus!* He's not dead. He is risen from the grave. He's alive. *Christ is alive!*

Emotions flood Mary's heart—can you imagine?—as she transitions from the depths of grief and sorrow to the heights of ecstasy and joy. Just when it appeared as though it was all over—to the shock and surprise of everyone—the Father raised Jesus bodily from the dead. Mary's song—better, *her symphony of celebration*—commences with great joy!

Mary's music is a five-word song: “I have seen the Lord” (John 20:18). “Lord” isn’t just a polite way of talking about Jesus, like “Sir” or “Mister.” With “Lord,” Mary is saying, “I have seen God, the King of the universe.” “I have seen the One through whom and for whom all things were made.” “I’ve seen the One who is coming again, riding on the clouds, as King of kings and Lord of lords!” That’s why Thomas’s parallel confession, in John 20:28, has these words: “My Lord and my *God!*”

What’s it all mean? It means that there’s more to our lives than what we think. It means that there’s more to our story than what we see. It means that there’s more than just death and taxes. Christ’s resurrection means that, just like Mary Magdalene, we have a song to sing!

Remember? *God loves to make music with misfits!* It's time, it's high time, for all of us misfits to make some music! I'll take the tuba. You take the trombone. You take the tambourine! And you? What instrument will you play today?

One thing's for sure. We have a song to sing! And we sing it with our lips and with our lives. What's the song called? Our song has four words. What are they? Alleluia, Christ has Risen! He has risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.