

Like yesterday's reading from John, with its unusual image of the Son of God grilling fish on the beach, today's reading isn't written by the same person who composed the Gospel it ends. Mark's Gospel, in the hand of its Evangelist, ends mysteriously with women running from the tomb charged with angelic tidings about the risen Lord, and the sardonic statement, *They said nothing to anyone, because they were frightened out of their wits*

In this, Mark's Gospel runs entirely true to type; throughout the body of it, Jesus finds his chosen collaborators infuriatingly stupid, dull beyond belief. He is frequently exasperated by their getting the wrong end of the stick, their total lack of initiative and response to what he tells them.

The later Gospels take this for granted. These men are, in meeting Jesus, in the presence of an unprecedented humanity, a totally new sort of being. He inhabits a world differently shaped from theirs. By the Fourth Gospel we find Jesus patiently but firmly saying it in plain words: *Where I am going you cannot come.*

There is no anger here; Jesus does not expect from them an understanding which is greater than their minds. In the writings of Luke, the process by which the disciples come to terms with Easter and its implications is depicted as gradual, and is dramatised in the stories of Emmaus and of the Easter appearances of Jesus; in the Acts of the Apostles Luke extends their duration to a symbolic forty-day period, echoing the forty years it took the Israelites to understand the Passover from slavery to freedom. Then he gives us the experience of Pentecost - the ultimate "penny-dropping", when all the lights come on and the flags are unfurled and the Church sets sail.

No-one was happy with the end of Mark's Gospel: the disciples are dispersed, and have run back to Galilee; the women are witless with fear and huddled together in silence. The question *However did the Church begin?* raises itself with cogency. The Gospel was therefore "finished" with appendices by other writers. Three of these survive in various manuscripts in various places. The Church has opted for the longest of them, which forms our Gospel today, and which describes several of the encounters with the risen Lord described in other Gospels. But there is still the Markan tone of recrimination and reproach: disciples are incredulous, they are obstinate, they refuse to believe.

I think that on this last day before the octave-day of Easter, the first Sunday of Christian remembrance - Thomas' Day - the Markan ending should come like a glass of cold water thrown in our face. We have listened to the stories: we have meditated on what our response should be; we have glimpsed the revolutionary new life that Easter holds out to us. But do we take the step forward, to seize this new humanity? Or does one of us say, like Peter yesterday, *I'm going to Morrison's*, and the others reply, *We'll come with you....?* I believe that is it. We have the capacity to pick up this or that jewel from the Gospel tradition, and say *Here's something moving, something beautiful....* and then we lay it down and return to normality, by which we understand the life we lived before we met the Lord.

Go out to the whole world: proclaim the Gospel to all Creation! The end of Mark returns us to the beginning of the Bible, Creation viewed as a unity. Now it must become an evangelised cosmos, a new world shining with the light of Easter. Like those scattered disciples and shivering women, we have to lay hold on what we have received, not for some private jewel-case of our own, but as the building-blocks of the new world, as gifts constantly renewed, to be given generously to all who live. Until we break the shell of our Easter Egg, and waddle forth as newly-hatched spring messengers of the light, we shall never write our new ending to the Gospel of Mark.