

I went to see a parishioner in hospital recently. I was wearing my uniform of dark gray suit and a clerical shirt. I asked at the front desk where I would find the parishioner. And the man said, "Yes," looked her up on the computer and said, "Yes, she's in room IRR3." I said, "Where's that?" And he stated to explain to me where it was, and it was left here, right there. You know what hospitals are like? He must have seen my face going blank. So, he said, "Don't worry, my colleague will escort you there." And a bright young female nurse did indeed start taking me to room IRR3. Sadly, you can't go very far in a hospital these days without going through security. So, as I went through security, the beeper went off. So, I had to go and show the guard my bag and I said, "Oh, it must be the communion set that set off the alarm." And he said, "That's fine." And on we went.

I didn't get much further before the nurse turned to me and said, "Are you a comedian?" I said, "I'm sorry?" She said, "Are you a comedian?" I said, "Well, I tell the odd dad joke, but I don't think that makes me a comedian. Why do you ask?" And she said, "Well, I thought you said to the security guard that you showed him your comedy set." The nurse thought I was a clown, dressed as a priest, with a box full of tricks to entertain a patient.

She completely mistook my identity. And there's another example of mistaken identity in the gospel that we've just heard. Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb that first Easter morning and she mistakes Jesus for the gardener. It was dark. Maybe we can understand that. It's clear from the reading that Mary has convinced herself that the tomb is empty because somebody, some unknown they has stolen Jesus' body. Twice, she says, "They have taken my Lord out of the tomb, and I do not know where they have laid him." And when she meets the figure who asks her why she is weeping, whom she supposes to be the gardener, she assumes that he's in on it, because she says again, "Sir, if you've carried him away, tell me where you have laid him." It's only when Jesus calls her by name that she recognizes him, that she identifies him for who he truly, truly is.

And what we see in this story is that sometimes mistaken identity involves a double mistake. Let me explain what I mean. When I was at college, I had a roommate called Bob, and halfway through our first semester, I saw him walking towards me down the high street. I said, "Hello, Bob." And he ignored me and walked past. So, I ran after him and said, "Bob, what's the matter?" He said, "I'm not Bob. I'm Pete, Bob's identical twin." I didn't know he had an identical twin.

And if the person wasn't Bob, then my own identity as a friend of Bob wasn't true either. I didn't know this person.

My identity was changed. It was a double mistake. The person wasn't Bob, and I wasn't a friend. I was a stranger to this person. And we see this phenomenon playing out in the gospel reading. As Mary recognizes Jesus' true identity, so something changes in her, too. When Mary is talking to the gardener, or who she thinks is the gardener, she is confused. She's weeping. She's trapped in this conspiracy theory that some unknown they have taken the body of her friend Jesus. If crucifixion wasn't bad enough, the theft of his body made things even worse.

Mary first appears in this story as a broken woman, crushed with grief. But when she realizes that she's not talking to the gardener, but to the risen Jesus, she too is transformed. Her weeping stops, and she rushes off immediately to the other disciples, proclaiming, "I have seen the Lord."

As Mary identifies Jesus correctly as the risen Lord, not the gardener, so she moves from a person overwhelmed with grief to someone full of hope. She becomes the first witness of the resurrection. And as we gather on this Easter morning, we too are called to identify Jesus properly. We might not think he's the gardener, but we might identify Jesus as a prophet, or a great moral teacher. But our true identity comes if we, like Mary, identify Jesus as Lord. As we recognize Jesus as the Lord, the risen son of God, we join the great family of people who know that death is not the last word. We become disciples of the one who brings hope.

As we embrace the reality of the resurrection of Jesus, so our understanding of ourselves and our world is transformed. We come to see that evil will never triumph. Out of death and destruction can come life. The God who created the world will not abandon it to decay. God is working in the darkness, out of sight, as he was on that first dark Easter morning, to establish his kingdom of peace and justice. Our God is a God who continually makes things new.

So, let's not mistake Jesus' identity this morning. He is the savior whom God raised from the dead. And as we identify Jesus correctly, so we'll come to a true understanding of who we are in him. And let me leave you with a deep and profound quote from St. Paul, who describes this great mystery thus. "If the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his spirit who lives in you." May we be given the grace to identify Jesus for who he truly is, so that we can come to know who we truly are.

Amen.