*Love to the loveless shown that they might lovely be.*

But, “where do pomegranates come from?” That’s the rather startling question that introduces some reflections on the love of God by the 12th century Abbot, St Bernard of Clairvaux.

The Pomegranate is used in the Christian tradition as a symbol of the resurrection. Its dark red fruit evokes the blood of Christ, and its seeds indicate the fruitfulness of his work of redemption.

If ever you have an opportunity to wander round the National Gallery, look out for the pomegranate in paintings of the Virgin and child – it’s often held by the infant Christ as a prophecy of his Passion and his resurrection.

St Bernard maintains that experience of the intensity of God’s love for us, which we have encountered in the events of the past three days, can make us feel wounded. We are wounded by the remembrance of our smallness, our hidden sins, and the limits of our courage and generosity. Bernard quotes from the Old Testament book, *The Song of Songs,* to describe the complex emotions this encounter might produce in us, as the soul declares: “Surround me with flowers, pile up apples around me, for I am sick with love.” (Sg 2:5).

There’s a sense of astonished bewilderment here, known by the lovers of every generation. It’s re-stated in our own time and idiom by the popular song writer Kate Melua, who asks “How can misery feel so sweet? This is the nearest thing to crazy I have ever known, I was never crazy on my own.”

No, this is what it might be like to discover the divine longing for a response from our poor hearts, so that the fleeting intoxication of God’s love wounds and expands us, prompting us to search for his presence.

St Bernard identifies the “apples” piled up around the “crazy”, wounded lover as pomegranates. In his imagination they are picked from the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden – no longer a forbidden fruit, but given in abundance to those regain access to paradise through the obedience even unto death of Jesus Christ, the second Adam.

Bernard urges us to find a sensuous delight in creation as the workshop in which Holy Scripture explains to us the mysteries of the love of God. Just as the colour and texture in the pomegranate can evoke that love, so can the fragrance and abundance of flowers. Bernard makes the startling claim that Christ delighted in flowers and their fragrance (oh yes, remember that saying, “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow….”) and wanted to be conceived and grow up in Nazareth. This only makes sense when we are reminded that the name Nazareth was understood to be derived from the word, “flower”.

“The signs of the resurrection are like the flowers of a new age blooming in a new summer of grace,” St Bernard writes: Christ’s “fragrance makes the dry grass grow green again…what was dead comes to life again.”

These themes of abundant fragrance, flowers, fruitfulness and the rising of the summer sun, coalesce across the Christian centuries to shape the language and the visual images of our celebration of Easter – love to the loveless shown that we might lovely be.

And it is with these images in mind that we can perhaps understand why, dazzled by the rising sun, and with eyesight bleared by tears, Mary Magdalen’s mistaking of Jesus for the gardener is no casual slip. Wounded by love, she states an important truth when she imagines that Jesus is the gardener. For indeed, he is. Confronted by the disorder of sin, the spiritual imagination of the Scriptures accurately identify the symptoms of this disorder in damage to the rhythms and working of the earth. When the prophet Jeremiah looks out over the earth and sees how people have become skilled in doing evil he also notes that the birds of the air have fled and the fruitful land is a desert (Jer 4:25, 26). But when mercy, truth, justice and peace are met, then, says the Psalmist, “our land shall give her increase”.

This year’s celebration of the paschal mystery of Easter is a joyful sign of hope for the future, as we seem to be emerging from the destructive shadow of the COVID pandemic. We shall need time to lament the loss of so very many loved ones, and to plan how we record with imagination and dignity our gratitude to those who have cared for us in this time, forgetful of their own needs. They are the heroes and the role models of our age.

But we also need wisdom to learn the lessons of this pandemic, which in so many ways has held up a mirror to our national and global society. What has it taught us about the absence of mercy in our care of the stranger, the lack of truth in public discourse, the reality of justice denied to those who cannot pay, and the pretence of peace beneath which ethnic cleansing is ruthlessly progressed? And just as pressingly, what has it taught us about the greed and waste that are driving a catastrophic level of damage to the earth?

The stranded container, (in the Suez canal, rather then the Littlehampton version!) Ever Given, is an icon of greed in our time. But it is also only a symptom from which none of us can stand aloof. A recent report indicated that the UK is one of the key drivers in the deforestation of the Ivory Coast and Ghana, in order to produce our chocolate.

God entrusted creation to the human race to be its stewards and also its priests. We are to care for the fragile beauty of our common home, the earth, and in worship to draw from it the gifts that acknowledge the glory of our creator and make sacred the environment and the relationships by which we live.

On this Easter Day, let us look with joy and confidence to the recovery of public worship in which we also rediscover our social, moral and spiritual lives. Jesus Christ is indeed the Master who will teach us how to live generously, humbly and well, not simply for ourselves but for the whole creation. He is the guide to who will show us the mystery of where the pomegranate comes from, as an ancient Christian author from Egypt explains:

Christ clothed himself in a body in order to rescue humanity laid waste by sin. He pulled up the thorns and thistles of evil spirits, tore out their weeds and burnt them with fire. And when he had tilled the ground of the soul with the wooden plough of the cross, he planted in it a lovely garden of the spirit, which brings forth for God the sweetest and most delightful fruit – the pomegranate.

*Love to the loveless shown that they might lovely be –* lovely in the beauty of holiness, worshipping God and giving thanks with all the hosts of heaven. For death is conquered, humanity is redeemed, and all creation is renewed.

*Christus vincit alleluia –* Christ has conquered, alleluia

*Christus regnat alleluia –* Christ is lord, alleluia

*Christus imperat alleluia –* He reigns forever, alleluia*.*