



SALUBONG:

AN EASTER
ENCOUNTER



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Words and Images by Brother Blair



“Wake up! Wake up!”

It was Mawa, my grandmother. It was time for the *Salubong*, an early Easter morning tradition in the Philippines.

Salubong literally means “meeting” or “encounter.” Mawa promised to tell me an interesting Easter story if I paid attention and agreed to observe carefully what will go on during the *Salubong*.

It was dawn of Easter Sunday and I’d better be not sleepy.

I miss Mawa so much.



“For now, children should join the women. We will be in procession from this side of our little village to the church patio. Don’t forget to bring your candle. Keep it lit while you pray.”

With us were statues of women saints. Among them, I remember seeing Mary Magdalene and Mother Mary vividly.

Mary Magdalene had a bottle of perfume in her hand! “Oh, that’s because she anointed Jesus’ feet. And she’s on her way to visit his tomb,” Mawa explained.

And Mother Mary had her whole face covered by a veil. “Her veil stands for sorrow upon the death of her son Jesus.”

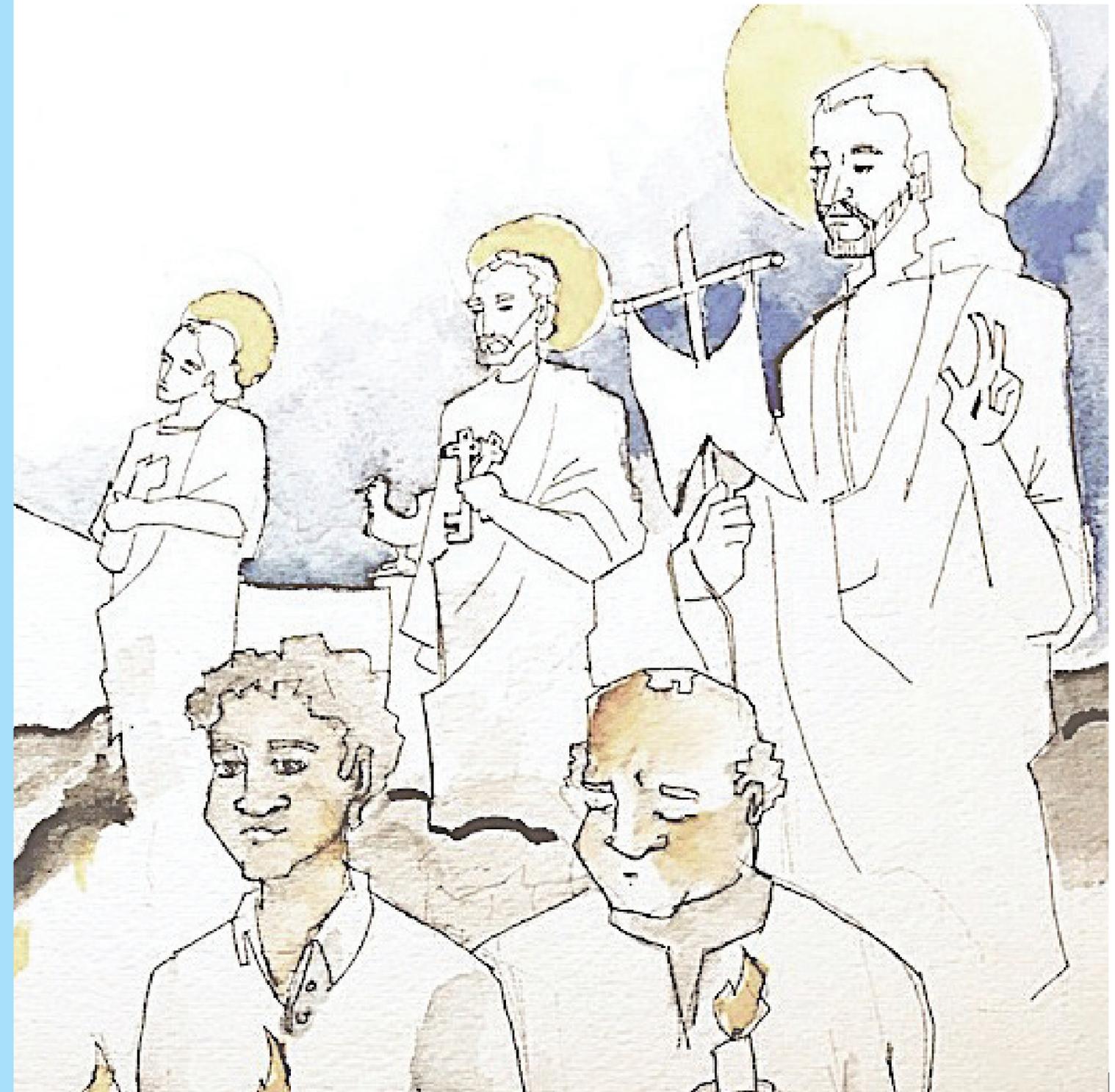
I have not realized then that there could be so much that could prevent us from truly seeing.

“The men have gone to the other side of the village. From there, they will also walk in procession to the church patio, where they will meet us. With them are statues of men saints including the risen Christ. Do you now see why this is called Salubong?”

I remember seeing statues of Saints Peter and John. St. Peter had a set of keys and a rooster beside him! “That’s because roosters alert us when its dawn. St Peter denied Jesus three times before the rooster crowed at dawn. Jesus had foreseen this. But for the keys, it’s a long story but let’s just say for now that Jesus entrusted Peter with an important task.”

And the young looking John... “Well, he was Jesus’ beloved disciple and he took care of his mother Mary.”

Jesus trusts people too much, I thought.





“There’s Father Lorenzo. He will lead us into prayer during the Salubong. Afterwards, he will also lead the celebration of the Mass.”

At the church patio, the two procession groups have finally met. The statues of the Mother Mary (with a veil covering her face) and the Risen Christ faced each other. Between them was an elevated platform.

"There's your cousin Marla. She's dressed as an angel. I think she's scared because her back is tied to a rope. From that high platform, she will descend, say the Regina Caeli prayer, and will lift the veil that covers Mother Mary's face."

"That's awesome! Why wasn't I asked to do that? And what does Regina Caeli mean?"

"Queen of heaven."

"So what do you think happens when the veil is lifted?"



Mother Mary saw and encountered her son,
the Risen Christ!

There was so much joy at the sight
of Jesus looking so victorious.

But everyone was happy too!

“Because Jesus lives and has saved us!”





Several years later, Mawa passed away after an accident.

While I wished she was at my side to continue telling me stories, I know I will see her again someday and we will have more stories to share.

I continued to read stories from the Bible and saw that these stories were also depicted on the colorful windows and images in the church.

I tried copying these beautiful images and tried to sketch the stories, as I understood them.

Many years, many sketches, many readings later,
I still could not find the exact story of the *Salubong* in the Bible.

So what if it is not there?
I am confident it must have happened, somehow.

After all, we continue to encounter the risen Christ
if we look and feel attentively.

“Wake up! Wake up” It’s time for yet another *salubong*.



END NOTES

I've decided to use a storybook format, because we adults need to hear our stories with simplicity and wonder.

I lost the only photograph I had of Mawa. Aside from remembering her through the power of words, I thought of remembering her visually. Not an exact copy, but a portrait of beloved memory.

My first Salubong with Mawa led me to further adventures – deepening my faith alongside my art – towards an encounter of the Risen One.