By Jacek Orzechowski, OFM

The Gospel passage for Easter describes Mary of Magdala bringing the news of empty tomb to the disciples of Jesus. She is an unlikely bearer of this hope-filled message since, in ancient Israel, women did not have legal standing to serve as credible witnesses. It is Mary of Magdala – not Peter or any other disciples – who first proclaimed the good news. She, whom our Christian tradition refers to as “apostle of the apostles,” brings the Gospel to those whose hope in Jesus was dashed upon the wood of the cross in the tragedy of Good Friday.

There are myriad personal and collective tragedies that keep millions of people locked in the tomb of asphyxiating helplessness and paralyzing despair. Structural injustice and racism, the deepening of political corruption and erosion of the public institutions, the war being waged on the poor and most vulnerable, the scandals in our Church – these are like a large, heavy stone covering the entrance to Jesus’ tomb. One issue in particular - anthropogenic climate change - threatens the collapse of human civilization and the extinction of much of the natural world. It is a tragedy in making that we are only beginning to come to terms with. Given the utmost gravity of the unprecedented ecological crisis we face, the theological and moral integrity of our theology compels us to engage Easter liturgy in a way that would contribute to the religious praxis of justice and mercy for the poor and the threatened Earth.

In that context, who are the contemporary Marys of Magdala, the unlikely messengers of the Good News and prophets of hope? Who are those who preach the Gospel by challenging us with their words and actions to come out of our comfort zones of privilege, to end our collective collusion with the systemic injustice, and to claim our God’s given power to help shape the destiny of the world? One such person is a Swedish teenager, Greta Thunberg. She has started a mass movement among children, organizing school walkouts for climate justice and demanding that older generations start to act like responsible adults. Greta’s movement has spread to 100 countries. Watch a short video of this girl’s speech given at the COP24 Climate Change Summit in Katowice in 2018.

Greta is a bearer of hope for humanity and bearer of God’s dream for Earth and all its creatures.
Among other unlikely messengers of the Good News, I would include other high school and college students organizing at their campuses to support the Green New Deal. The increasing number of young women and men who call themselves the Laudato Si’ Generation challenge individuals and institutions to get out of the tomb of climate-change denial, to open our ears to the cry of the poor and cry of the earth, and to protect the poor and our common home.

This Easter season, let us learn more about these and other bearers of hope and consider how you and I can respond to the good news they bear by doing justice for the poor and protecting our common home.