

# The Joy of Easter

Easter, 1979

My dear Friends,

A spiritual writer once remarked, "Everything is the raw material of redemption, of resurrection, for in the middle of our sufferings and our deaths, Christ the Conqueror waits. And this means, that if we are but willing every moment of our lives, we can resound with the joy of Easter. We can be unhappy and despondent only when we forget that the Risen Lord destroyed the finality of physical death and the sting of defeat that tends to accompany every painful human situation. Our greatest experience of Easter comes to us, then, when we can say that Jesus is alive and when we sense His profound peace even in the midst of adversity."



The life to which Christ has raised us from the dead is a life of love. If we believe in eternal life, then our lives should become a sacrament of Easter — a visible sign that eternal life has already begun in us and that we are people willing to share His life with others who show signs of the death of despair. For, just as we experience a personal resurrection when we are strongly loved, so we incarnate Easter when we do the same to others. St. John testifies to this, "We have passed out of death and into life and of this we can be sure, because we love our brothers." (1 John 8:14)

When the Liturgy challenges us to proclaim the mystery of faith, the Church is really saying to us, "Let Easter be now and every day. Never use your faith in Christ's Resurrection nor your hope in a final personal resurrection to avoid living Easter now."

Much of our world is entombed in seeming hopelessness and darkness. "If these dead are not raised," as St. Paul testifies, "then Christ has not been

raised." We need Alleluia people who in the joy of their own lives proclaim the victory of Christ and offer hope to a world that needs to be assured of the possibility of a resurrection from its doubts, fears and anxieties.

St. Augustine described the faithful Christian as an Alleluia person from head to toe — as one who proclaims by word and deed, "He is Risen! Alleluia!"

May the blessings of this Holy Feast be a challenge and reminder of our vocation to be an Easter people!

With my blessing, I remain

# The Hope that Dispels Our Darkness

Following are excerpts from the text of Pope John Paul II's homily given at the parish of San Basilio in Rome during March.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters,

First of all I wish to greet you all cordially. The visit to your parish gives me the possibility of formulating this greeting personally and also of receiving your personal response. This greeting and this response come from awareness of that particular unity that we form in the Church of Jesus Christ, and especially in the Diocese of Rome. Greeting one another, we express this unity which has a value that is not alone "organizational." Your parish . . . is not only an essential part of the whole diocese of Rome, but takes its place authentically in that unity which is the Church. Made famous here in Rome, by St. Peter and St. Paul she is set up by the Apostles of Christ the Lord, and is rooted in a particular way in the "foundation" of our salvation which is Christ and in faith in him.



That foundation is such that no other exists outside it, and "no other foundation can any lay than that which is laid." "There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

In the spirit of this unity I extend to you my greeting, and I receive yours, your response, which is a response of faith. It is particularly significant at the time of Lent, in which we all live more deeply the very reality of our 'growth' on the foundation of Jesus Christ, of his passion and death, of his redemption. Here, in Rome, the traces of this growth based on Christ are particularly strong and eloquent.

This is a meeting in faith, the content of which is specified by the word of God in the liturgy of today. A strong, deep and essential content. Listening to St. Paul's letter to the Romans, we find at once the key-reality of faith. "If God is for us, who is against us?" He

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who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies; who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us?"

God is with us! God is with man! With humanity. The only and complete proof of this is and always remains the following: "He did not spare his own Son but gave him up for all."

In order to emphasize this truth ever more, the liturgy refers to the book of Genesis: to the sacrifice of Isaac. When God asked Abraham for this offering, He wished in a certain way to prepare the conscience of the elect People for the sacrifice that his Son would carry out. God spared Isaac and also spared the heart of his Father Abraham. But "He did not spare his own Son!" Abraham became "the father of our faith," because, with his readiness to sacrifice his son Isaac, he heralded the sacrifice of Christ, which is a peak moment along the ways of faith of the whole of mankind. We are all aware of this. This consciousness brings new life to our souls, particularly during Lent. This consciousness moulds our Christian life from its deepest roots. It moulds it from beginning to end.

God is with us through the cross of his Son. And this cross is also the first source of our spiritual strength. When the Apostle asks: "If God is for us, who is against us?" with this question he embraces everything and all those who can be a danger for our spirit, for our salvation.

"Who is to condemn? Is it Christ Jesus, who died,

yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us?"

*From faith in Christ, in his cross and resurrection, hope is born. Great trust! Let it be our strength, especially in the difficult moments of life.*

My thought and my word go especially to all those who are in difficulties of various kinds: to those who are suffering in the body and the spirit; to those who are going through trials of a social character, such as negative experiences at work or misunderstandings in the family; to those young people who are perhaps going through a moment of crisis; to those who are tackling with commitment difficulties of a pastoral nature, such as lack of understanding or indifference to spiritual values and resistance to the Holy Spirit. In Christ, everyone has the right to hope.

In the Gospel of today we find a particular manifestation of that hope which is born from faith in Jesus Christ. Just at the time of Lent the Church reads to us again the Gospel of the Transfiguration of the Lord. This event, in fact, took place for the purpose of preparing the apostles for the difficult ordeals of Gethsemane, the Passion, the humiliation of the scourging, of the crowning with thorns, of the Via Crucis, of Calvary.

In this perspective, Jesus wanted to show the apostles closest to him the splendor of the glory that shines forth in him, which the Father confirms with voice from above, revealing his divine sonship and his Mission: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."

The splendor of the glory of the Transfiguration embraces nearly; the whole of the Old Covenant and arrives at the astounded eyes of the Apostles who were to become teachers of that faith from which hope is born; of those Apostles, who were to proclaim the whole mystery of Christ.

"Lord it is well that we are here," Peter, James and John exclaim, as if they wanted to say: You are the incarnation of the hope to which the human soul and the human body aspires! A hope that is stronger than the cross and Calvary! A hope that dispels the darkness of our existence, of our sin, of death.