

RIISING WITH JESUS TO A NEW LIFE: EASTER SUNDAY C

The story is told of a rabbi (a Jewish teacher) who gathered all his students together very early in the morning while it was still dark. He asked them: *'How can you tell when the night has ended and the day has begun?'* One student answered: *'Maybe it's when you see an animal and you can tell whether it's a sheep or a dog.'* 'No,' the rabbi said. A second student answered: *'Maybe it's when you are looking at a tree in the distance and you can tell whether it's a fig tree or a peach tree.'* 'No,' said the rabbi. After a few more guesses the students demanded the answer. The rabbi replied: *'It's when you look on the face of any woman or man and see that she is your sister and he is your brother. If you cannot do this, no matter what time it is, it is still night.'*

For John, as we heard in his gospel today, Easter begins very early in the morning of the first day of the week while it is *'still dark'*. But the same writer has insisted that *'the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining'*. But this is strictly on one condition: *'Whoever loves a brother or sister,'* he says, *'lives in the light.'* On the other hand, *'whoever hates . . . is in the darkness.'* (1 Jn 2:8-11).

Just two days ago, when you and I were remembering the sufferings and death of the most marvellous human being the world has ever known, we came face to face with the dark side of human nature, the darkness that led the enemies of Jesus to torture, humiliate, and finally murder him on a cross. On that black day in Jerusalem, the capacity of human beings to hate, hurt and harm one another went completely out of control. It's no wonder, then, that *'darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon'*, that *'the sun's light failed'*, and that *'the curtain of the temple was torn in two'* (Lk 23:24).

Between light and darkness, between good and evil, one mighty struggle is still going on. It's going on in the physical world, in human societies, and within our own personalities. Although the darkness often appears to be stronger than the light, it has not yet triumphed. The light is remarkably resilient. Often in danger of being extinguished, it manages to survive, and even to win many victories. The words of Mahatma Gandhi, the father of modern India, are as true as ever: *'When I despair I remember that all through history the way of truth and love has always won. There have been tyrants and murderers, and for a time they can seem invincible, but, in the end, they always fall.'* The words of the Easter Vigil liturgy express the same truth in an equally appealing way: *'The power of this holy night,'* it proclaims, *'dispels all evil, washes guilt away, restores lost innocence, brings mourners joy. It casts out hatred, brings us peace, and humbles earthly pride.'*

Our celebration of Easter reminds us that the darkness of evil and hatred will never have the last say. For the resurrection of Jesus proclaims the ultimate triumph of light over darkness and of goodness over evil, both in us and in our world.

Jesus was buried at sunset, as darkness was once again creeping over the earth, to all appearances a victim and a failure. But on the third day afterwards the sun came up on him

victorious and triumphant, alive, powerful and influential. Once again, *'the true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world'* (Jn 1:9)

So we celebrate his resurrection today by rising from darkness and death ourselves. The Risen Lord, represented here by this beautiful Easter candle burning in our midst, is asking us to leave behind the works of darkness, to renounce and reject anything and everything in our lives which is dark, sinister and evil, and to *'walk always as children of the light'*, following in his footsteps.

So I invite and urge you now to renew your baptismal promises. Reject darkness, evil and sin in every shape and form. And promise to follow Jesus Christ from this moment onwards in a life of light, goodness and love, a life shaped by his own powerful example, a life supported and guided by the Holy Spirit, whom he first gave us at baptism and whom he gives us again here and now this Easter Day. So together, dear People of God, let us renew our baptismal promises, and renew them as loudly, clearly, joyfully and enthusiastically as we possibly can . .

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