

EASTER: LIGHT AND JOY, HOPE AND CHALLENGE

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When the Easter Vigil starts it tends to be totally dark, except for the light coming from the fire burning at the entrance to the church. One year a little girl grasped her mother's hand tightly, looked up and said: *'Mummy, why is it so dark?'* Her mother thought for a while and then she answered: *'To remind us what the world would have been like if Jesus had not been raised from the dead.'*

Just two days ago you and I were remembering the sufferings and death of Jesus our Saviour. As we looked on his crucified body with sorrow, love and gratitude, we came face to face with the dark side of human nature that led his enemies to torture and humiliate him before killing him on the rough wood of 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.

Good Friday found us wondering over and over again: Why was this good man, this innocent man, this man with so much humanity and compassion, so much honesty and integrity, so much warmth and generosity, so much love and affection, violated, humiliated, tortured and murdered?

The motives which led his enemies to persecute and destroy him are those which have always influenced human beings to hurt and harm one another - arrogance and pride, power-seeking and ambition, envy and jealousy, anger and fear, hatred and revenge. Good Friday reminds us of the dark side of human nature and its associated evils - poverty, ignorance, crime, malnutrition, hunger and disease.

Fortunately, however, this is not the whole truth. In fact, it is far from it. For if we experience so much evil we also experience an abundance of goodness. The crops keep producing food for our tables. The summer heat gives way to cooling autumn breezes. Most diseases are now curable. Tyrants are sometimes overthrown. Social reforms like pensions for the needy are here to stay. Conflicts end in reconciliation. Shaky marriages get patched up. Love survives misunderstandings, thoughtlessness, and indifference. Wars come to an end. Enemies become friends. We forgive others and are forgiven. In a word, there is goodness everywhere, more goodness than evil. Clearly the influence of the Risen Christ, which is to say the light of Easter, keeps shining upon us.

Yet there can be no doubt that one mighty struggle goes on between good and evil. It goes on in the material universe, in human societies, and within our own personalities. Evil even seems stronger than good. But it has not yet finally triumphed. Good is remarkably resilient. Though too often it seems to be in danger of being crushed, it manages to survive, and even to win many victories. The words of Mahatma Gandhi, Father of Independent India, are so true: *'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 our Easter Vigil Service express the same truth in an even more appealing way: *'The power of this holy [Easter] night 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 the resurrection of Jesus reminds us that evil will not have the last say either in us or in our world. It leaves us in no doubt about the ultimate triumph of goodness, not only in ourselves but everywhere around us.

Jesus was buried at sunset, to all appearances a victim and a failure. But the sun came up on him alive and powerful, influential and victorious. It will be the same for us who celebrate Easter above all by renouncing and rejecting anything and everything dark and evil in our lives, and by renewing our determination to always walk with Jesus in his light. That's why we are renewing our baptismal promises today, and renewing them with conviction and enthusiasm.

Remember! We are turning our backs on evil and sin in every shape and form, and promising to keep following Jesus in a life of goodness and love, one shaped by his own shining example, and one sustained by his powerful presence.