

## **Easter Message from Fr. George**

What does it mean to believe in the Resurrection of the Lord? During Easter many of us will witness people becoming Catholic by professing their faith and receiving the Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist. Our newest brothers and sisters have undergone months of preparation that include understanding and completely accepting that God so loved the world that He sent His Son who became truly human while remaining truly God and His name is Jesus, the Christ. And more, Jesus came to the world to share in all it means to be human, including death, so that he can share with us His divine, eternal life. Our new Catholics entered into the Church precisely because they believe that on the cross Jesus truly died, and He rose from the dead, body and soul. Because of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, they have the sure and certain hope that they, too, will be resurrected body and soul on the last day and then be with God forever in perfect joy. I share in this same faith, and, I pray, you do as well.

Of course this is a lot to put one's faith in. And yet our new brothers and sisters in the Church believe because they have encountered Jesus, both crucified and resurrected. I, too, have experienced the suffering Jesus and the risen Lord in my life and in the lives of those around me.

One of the most powerful encounters I had with Jesus, crucified and risen, happened a dozen years ago in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. This massive and ancient church was built over both the place where Jesus was crucified and the area nearby where our Lord rose from the dead. This is the holiest place on earth, and, yet, it is a place of great disappointment that tempted me to despair. Christians, Jews, and Muslims have been involved in some conflict in and around Jerusalem from the time of Jesus to the present day. Even the Christians who run the church, Catholics, Orthodox, and other ancient eastern Christian sects, come to blows over who is in charge of particular parts of the church at certain times. It is so sad that the place where Jesus died and rose from the dead is in shambles, not because there isn't money to restore and beautify the Holy Sepulcher, but because Christians cannot come to an agreement over what should be done to preserve this sacred space.

And yet, very early on a Sunday morning, I offered Mass in the tomb where Jesus rose from the dead. I cannot explain the experience, other than to say, I knew I was with the Lord at the moment of His resurrection. I also knew that as I was praying, I experienced Jesus crucified in the tension in that Church, in Jerusalem, and throughout the world. From time to time, when I offer Mass to this day, I have the same experience. In the Eucharist Jesus is present, alive, crucified, and risen, and in communion with this suffering world. I know this to be true, as do our new brothers and sisters who have made their First Communion this Easter.

Having faith in the Resurrection of Jesus means living in hope and not in despair. Jesus does not shy away from the whole misery of humanity. He continues to reside in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, in those dying in Gaza, and all the people and places of suffering around the world. Christ has crucified Himself to all of this. If we are Christians we cannot turn away from this misery, for to do so is to ignore Jesus on the cross. As a disciple I need to pay attention to where Jesus wants me to share in His Cross, in helping those I encounter physically and spiritually. I, too, have my burdens and sufferings, that I am called to bear with hope because Jesus is shouldering those crosses with me. Part of my cross is knowing that I cannot solve the problem of human suffering around the world or, often, even right in front of me.

But we are not meant to just give up because we don't have the power to stop all or even some small part of suffering and evil. We believe that Jesus has already won the victory over sin and death. If some seemingly good outcome I desire doesn't come to fruition all is not lost, because true joy does not flow from human successes, which are always limited at best, but only in the cross and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ has won the victory, and my own struggle is a share in the cross that the Lord will use for my salvation and those of others. And salvation is not accomplished by me or anyone else trying to eliminate suffering and tension. Salvation is accomplished through Jesus' death and resurrection. This is why I could serenely pray for peace in the Holy Land at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and express my gratitude to my brother and sister non-Catholic Christians who were not particularly happy to see me there. This is why, amid all the suffering in the world, our newest brothers and sisters received into the Church are rejoicing. This is why at Easter we renew our own baptismal promises to believe in Jesus, crucified and risen, and unite our lives to His. The Lord is risen! Indeed, He is risen!