

For Christians, Easter is a time of joy and hope; it is a celebration of life and of new possibilities. Jesus who died is alive; he lives in God, he lives for us. Daily Mass throughout Easter week proclaims, "This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad. Alleluia."

For many today, hope is not something that comes easily. Some of the things taking place in our world provoke in us negative thoughts and feelings, even, in some cases, to the point of despair. Whether the issue is politics, economics, the environment, family life, the abusive use of the social media or the kind of murderous terrorist actions like those which took place this morning in Sri Lanka, we are confronted with enormous challenges and, at the same time, with an increasing inability of many to work together to overcome them. There are no easy solutions to our problems, and the ones suggested often contradict one another. The difficulty is enhanced by the fact that those who think they have a solution are so convinced of being right that they judge anyone who disagrees with them to be stupid, ill willed, or worse.

Many of us seem to have lost the ability to lay out in a respectful way our vision and to argue for it and at the same time to be ready to listen to other views

and other arguments. In many cases, polarization is making it difficult and sometimes all but impossible to work together.

If this is true of our society, it is also true to some degree of the church. We too face serious issues from the abuse of children and others by priests and religious to a polarization that creates an attitude that leads some to condemn as bad Catholics or heretics those who disagree with them. This extends in some cases to outspoken animosity towards, and criticism of, Pope Francis.

I am sure that you, like me, were touched this week by the images we saw of the burning of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. As devastating as the damage was, it could have been much worse. Many who have written or spoken about the fire view the loss primarily in cultural terms. Notre Dame is a symbol of much of what is at the heart of Western culture – the coming together over time of Christian faith and devotion with the art, technology and political will of people like the French and more broadly of European society.

For believers, the cathedral is all that and more. It is at the centre of the religious life of Paris and of France, a sacred place in which, over the centuries, countless numbers of believers have been baptized and married, received

communion, prayed and participated in the great feasts of the liturgical year. It has been both the house of God and the spiritual home of believers.

In spite of the sadness and sense of loss that many experienced as they saw the delicately designed spire fall from the roof and the flames leap up into the sky, people began almost immediately to speak of rebuilding it.

As shocking as the fire was, the reaction it has provoked, among many, is one of commitment and hope. There is a conviction, whether for cultural or religious reasons or for a combination of both, that the cathedral must be rebuilt. That it can be done was shown after the Second World War when many seriously damaged cathedrals and churches throughout Europe were given a new life.

If this is what people are ready to do for the cathedral, a work of stone and glass, how much more committed should we be to work and pray of the spiritual renewal of the church. Our celebration over the last few days of the death and resurrection of Jesus and of the new life he has won for us, should fill us with hope that people of good will – clergy and laity – will be able to come together to work collaboratively for that renewal.

We first encountered the new life celebrated at Easter in baptism. There, as the Apostle Paul once put it, “We were buried with Christ by baptism into his

death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so too we might walk in a newness of life.”

Baptism, far from being a once and for all event, marks the beginning of a new life, a life rooted in the mystery of God, a life made possible by the gift of the Holy Spirit, a life in which Christ lives in us and we in him. To remind us of this and to invite us to renew our commitment to live a life worthy of the gifts that are ours, the Easter liturgy invites us to renew the faith we professed and the promises we made or that were made for us by others at our baptism.