

Easter Sunday

In a multi-cultural country like Canada, Easter has taken on a range of meanings. For some it celebrates spring and the sense of renewal and of newness that spring awakens in us. For others it is above all an occasion for families to gather and through conversation and shared food to celebrate and strengthen the bonds that unite them across the generations. These and a host of traditions of one kind or another make Easter a special time for many. This year, however, it is somewhat overshadowed by the difficult moment we are living through in our struggle with the corona virus, a moment that is both hopeful and threatening.

For Christians, the many forms of our Easter celebrations all relate to, and receive their deepest meaning from, what we call the paschal mystery, the Christian Passover, the death and resurrection of Jesus. In our faith as in life in general, nothing is more fundamental to human experience than the double reality of life and death, of death and life.

On Good Friday, we meditated on the enormous paradox of the death of Jesus. It was something that he both suffered and actively embraced and consciously lived through. He was physically abused, mocked, betrayed and

abandoned. His trial and the sentencing to which it led represent an utter travesty of justice.

At the same time, out of fidelity to his mission and out of love for us, Jesus not only accepted, but welcomed what was done to him. "He loved us," Paul says" and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

We should think of the resurrection of Jesus less as a past event and more as a present reality. It is not a return to this life but a breakthrough, as it were, in the power of the Spirit to the kind of life in the infinite mystery of God to which we are all called.

As the risen Christ, Jesus continues to be present among us, doing in other ways the things we see him doing in the Gospels. Now as then, he is compassionate and merciful, and reaches out to the sick, the poor, and the abandoned. He offers forgiveness, consolation and the promise of a better life. At the same time, he challenges us to love one another, to be merciful and kind, to recognize and respect in everyone the dignity in which we all share as creatures made in God's image and likeness.

Easter and especially the Easter vigil have once again become a privileged time for the celebration of baptism. In order to underline that, we are invited at the Easter Masses to renew our baptismal promises.

The risen Christ comes among us in a unique way in the sacraments, especially in baptism and the Eucharist. In baptism we enter for the first time into the mystery of his death and resurrection and in doing so receive the gift of his Spirit. We are born again, born into a new and deeper relationship with Christ and with one another. That more than anything else is what we should remember and give thanks for as we renew our baptismal promises, above all the promise implicit in the other promises, the promise to live our life in a way that corresponds to and reflects the life that has become ours in baptism, the life of Christ.

The Easter message proclaims the ultimate triumph of life over death. At the same time it encourages us to confront, with faith and hope, the various challenges that threaten to undermine our common humanity. The greatest of these facing us at this time is the pandemic. May the risen Christ be with us as we continue to struggle in our different ways to meet and overcome it.