

Memory, freedom, perspective

April 2021



Christ is Risen! The angelic joyful message resounds upon all the earth

We have left Lent behind us and have entered the brightness of the Paschal period, which brings home to us that neither pain nor the difficulties and the darkness of the present times have the last word in our lives and upon this earth. Christ, the Risen One is the last word, a word of Life everlasting.

What does this mean? How relative is the message of the Resurrection to us today?

This message has from the beginning been the cornerstone of the Church's Faith. Whole generations and armies of martyrs give witness and confess this miracle which the human mind cannot fathom, however, the human heart trembles in excitement and anticipation at its proclamation.

“If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men” (1 Cor. 15, 17-19).

Yes, the Lord is risen and He calls us to our own personal rising. He calls us into the freedom of the children of God, to stand erect, to live in the light of the life He freely gives us. Then we take it upon ourselves to become witnesses of the Good News: Christ is Risen and thus He offers us eternal life!

Despair, sadness and fear have no place in our lives anymore. Our life, as baptised members of the Church, is full of hope, for we look forward to endless life in God; it is full of joy, for we know how greatly loved we are by God, who saves us through the Passion and Resurrection of His Only Begotten Son; we are full of courage, for we do not walk on alone, but the Risen Christ accompanies us on our way.

Let us have a look at the “pre-history” of the Christian Passover, the Christian Easter.

In the Old Testament God freed the Israelites from the bondage of the Egyptians and on Mount Sinai He gave them His Law, the Decalogue, i.e. the Ten Commandments. This happened around 1200 B.C. The Israelites, who initially were nomadic and then immigrants into the land of Egypt in order to avoid the famine that decimated Palestine at the time of Patriarch Jacob, they became a People with a leader (Moses) and a Law.

The First Commandment

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

You shall have no other gods before me.

(Exodus, 20, 2,3)

The First Commandment reminds to the people an historical (and recent to them, at the time) event, absolutely relevant to their existence. It makes no reference to an abstract idea, to a philosophical point of view regarding God, but mentions the Living God who acts for the good of His people. He is not an invention of the intellect, but the God who exists, who is existence itself and who is the Unique God and the All Other (Transcendent).

At the same time, because God wishes man to worship him with his reason/spirit (*Rom. 12, John 4, 24*) He invites man to make use of his reason and will and thus to be in a state of continual dialogue with God, so to speak.

So, we see that God asks of us to obey Him like persons who have a historical memory (I took you out of Egypt), like free persons (I took you out of slavery) and in this way like persons with a perspective for the future.

It is true that the perspective / destiny of mankind became clear only with the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Incarnation of God's Only Son, His Crucifixion and Resurrection revealed to us the depths of God's love for us and the worth we have in his eyes. Since the Old Testament times God was slowly preparing humankind to receive His Revelation.

“You shall not have other gods but Me”

God is revealed as **the unique centre** of His People's existence; He is the centre of History and He alone gives meaning to all and everything and to every person.



On the Night of the Resurrection the Church sings:

This is the night when you first saved our fathers: you freed the people of Israel from their slavery and led them dry-shod through the sea.

...

This is the night when Christians everywhere, washed clean of sin and freed from all defilement, are restored to grace and grow together in holiness.

This is the night when Jesus Christ broke the chains of death and rose triumphant from the grave.

...

What good would life have been for us, had Christ not come as our Redeemer?

Father, how wonderful your care for us! How boundless your merciful love! To ransom a slave you gave away your Son.

O happy fault, O necessary sin of Adam, which gained for us so great a Redeemer!

Night truly blessed when heaven is wedded to earth and man is reconciled to God!

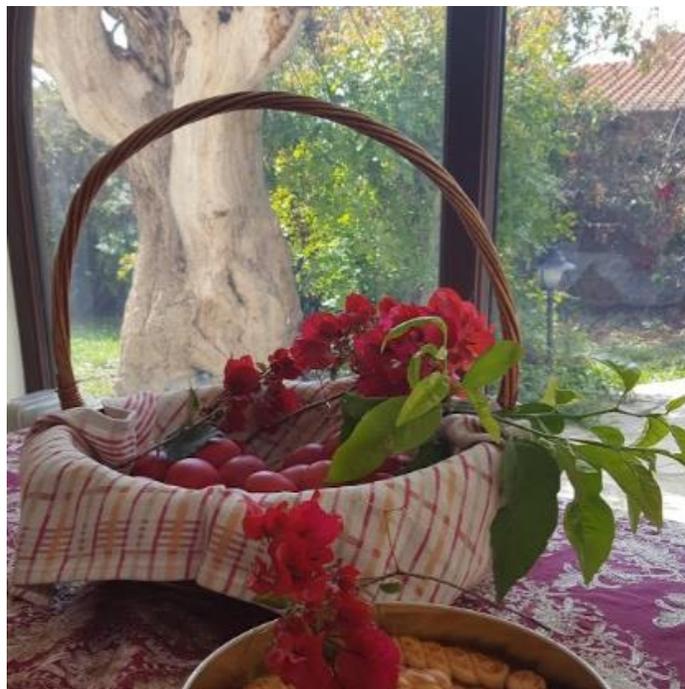
(Exultet, excerpts)

In the light of the Resurrection we remember our personal history and God's great love at every stage of our life. We do have the perspective full of hope which gives meaning and significance to our existence, to our pursuits, our pains and efforts, our joys and even our failures and sorrows. The Son of God became the Son of Man (without sin) and suffered His Passion and death on the Cross for us. He came into the world like one of us , taught and suffered and **was crucified, and has risen for our sake, in our place, on our behalf and in our name!**

Let us therefore reciprocate His Love!

Celebrating Pascha

April 2021 / part 2



Easter and its significance

The Hebrew word for Easter is ***Pesach*** (*in Latin and Greek **Pascha***) and means Passover, i.e. passing over.

In the Old Testament the feast of the Pesach was the commemoration of the passing of the Israelites through the Red Sea over to the other side, when Moses led them from the slavery of Egypt into freedom.

The Christian Easter feast denotes the passing of Jesus Christ over from death to Life, i.e. it is the feast of Christ's Resurrection. The well-known greeting "Good Easter" and "Good Resurrection" in the Greek-speaking world, which follows Easter Sunday for several days (it used to be until Ascension Day) beyond its social and ecclesial dimension has a spiritual one: in it is contained the anticipation of every one's personal Passover from this life, marred and wounded by sin and death, to the Risen Life with Christ.

This Risen Life does not begin once our earthly life is over; it has already begun by our Baptism and it is strengthened every time we pray and do good and every time we approach the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion with deep desire and love.

Sunday, the day of joy

Starting from Easter Sunday, and every Sunday, the Church celebrates the splendid and full of gladness mystery of the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The joyful character of Sunday was so important in the primitive Church that we read in the "Didaché of the Apostles" (the Apostles Teaching), a book written around the beginning of the 2nd century, "The Christian faithful must be joyful on Sunday and neither must he cause sorrow to himself nor be sad, for the he sins."!

Moreover, Sunday has never been a day of fasting and, in the Orient, the faithful were encouraged to pray standing up. It was forbidden to them to kneel on a Sunday, since kneeling was viewed as the gesture par excellence of repentance, which does not "agree" with the good and joyful news of the Resurrection!



The liturgy, a living experience and participation

The basic structure of the Church's liturgy is centred on the Paschal Mystery, which is the central mystery of Salvation. The Church always celebrates in each of her liturgies one and only mystery, the Paschal Mystery, i.e. the death and Resurrection of Jesus. ***The liturgy's primary aim is not teaching, but rather enacting and experiencing the life of Christ.*** Through the liturgy the person of Christ is revealed and His work of Salvation is remembered and lived.

The faithful's participation in the liturgy of the Church engages their whole mind and heart and this way they may enter into a more dynamic and vital communion with God and with each other.

Through the liturgical action of the Church we are introduced and drawn into the incessant movement of Love that exists in the bosom of the Tri-une God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The liturgy is only possible through the living and acting presence of Christ. Through His Church our Lord continues His saving work that is our sanctification and our union with Him. Through the Church we receive light and gladness in our spiritual life.

A patrimony which must be shared

*As Pastors, we have first of all reflected on the mission to proclaim the Gospel in today's world. This mission, "Go, make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19), is today more timely and necessary than ever, even in traditionally Christian countries. Moreover, we cannot ignore the increase of secularisation, relativism, even nihilism, especially in the Western world. All this calls for a renewed and powerful proclamation of the Gospel, adapted to the cultures of our time. Our traditions represent for us **a patrimony which must be***

continually shared, proposed, and interpreted anew. This is why we must strengthen our cooperation and our common witness before the world.

(Common Declaration of Pope Benedict XVI and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, §3, 30/11/2006)