

## **Easter Sunday April 4, 2021**

Last month, Pope Francis traveled to Iraq to pray with the people of that troubled land. For many decades, the country has struggled with a brutal dictatorship, wars, and terrorism. Christians in Iraq have suffered terribly. Between 2014 and 2017, ISIS tried to drive Christians out of Iraq. They burned down homes and destroyed churches. Many Christians fled the country with their families in fear for their lives. At one time, there were as many as 1.4 million Christians in Iraq. Today, it is estimated that only about 250,000 remain.

Though many people advised the Pope against going to Iraq, he was insistent on spending time with a people who have suffered so much. He wanted to support Christians who made the decision to stay in Iraq despite the difficulties. He also wanted to promote dialogue between Christians and Muslims, to let the world know that it was possible for us to live in peace together. And, he wanted to preach the good news that love can conquer hate, that hope can overcome despair, and that faith can do all things.

Some of the most powerful images of his trip to Iraq is of the Pope standing in front of bombed out churches and destroyed homes. In those places where there had been so much violence and destruction, he spoke about how the work of God can never be destroyed.

In his homily during a Mass in the city of Erbil, he told the people: "Even amid great poverty and difficulty, many of you have generously offered concrete help and solidarity to the poor and suffering. That is one of the reasons that led me to come as a pilgrim in your midst, to thank you and to confirm you in your faith and witness."

He went on to say, "Today, I see firsthand that the Church in Iraq is alive, that Christ is alive and at work in this, his holy and faithful people." Despite all the devastation, all the suffering, and all the violence, Pope Francis could say that Jesus is alive and at work in His people and in His Church.

That is the message we celebrate today. Jesus Christ is alive. He is risen. Though He suffered the cruelest of deaths, though all the forces of evil pressed against Him, they could not defeat Him. The Creator of Life has conquered death. The God who is Love has conquered hate. Through faith and baptism, we share in that victory. We no longer need to be afraid. Jesus Christ is alive and, in Him, we also live.

That is why Pope Francis can stand in the midst of so much devastation in Iraq and proclaim that Christ is alive. No matter how powerful the forces of evil appear to be, no matter how much suffering they cause, we can affirm our faith that Jesus Christ

## **Easter Sunday April 4, 2021**

has won the victory. That victory is only apparent to those who have faith as St Paul tells us in today's second reading. But it is real, nonetheless. It can empower us to face any difficulty with courage and confidence.

Today's gospel tells the story of that first Easter morning. Mary Magdalene discovers that Jesus is no longer in the tomb. Her first reaction isn't joy. Rather, she feels confused and distressed. We hear the pain in her voice as she tells Peter, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they put him."

We will see this theme throughout the Easter Season. The signs of new life and resurrection are all around the disciples, but they cannot recognize it. They are too focused on their trauma and despair. In many cases, even when Jesus appears to them personally, they don't know that it's Him. They have to have it spelled out to them before they can understand and believe.

The same is true for us. The signs of Jesus' resurrection are all around us. It is in the Church He established which has endured despite violent persecution. It is in hearts that choose forgiveness and love over revenge and hate. It is in the progress we make through faith and grace to overcome our sinfulness and grow in holiness. It is in sinners who realize God's mercy and embrace His love. Jesus is alive. He is present and active in our world. If we believe it, we will see it.

That is not to say that there is not much suffering in our world. It is all around us. But it is precisely in this that we make our faith known. Because of Jesus' resurrection, we can say that suffering, sin, and death will not have the last word. Rather, all of history is building up to the day when God's victory will be revealed. We are all on a journey to a bright and glorious future when we can say with St Paul, "I believe that the sufferings of the present are as nothing compared to the glory that will be revealed in us" (Rom 8:18). It has all been set in motion by Jesus Christ who is risen from the dead.

We are active participants in this victory. It is up to us to proclaim it to the world. It is up to us to live it in our homes and in our communities.

The ability to live in the power of Jesus' resurrection is ours through baptism. When St Paul tells us in today's second reading, "For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." he is talking about baptism. In the waters of baptism, our sinful self is drowned so that the risen life of Jesus Christ can take over our lives. Our Risen Lord is alive in each of us through baptism. It is a hidden life, but it is real nonetheless, and it can transform us.

**Easter Sunday**  
**April 4, 2021**

At this Mass, we will renew the promises of our baptism. We will reject sin and profess our faith in Jesus Christ who is risen from the dead. No matter what darkness and evil might be lurking around us, let us renew these promises with faith that God's love is stronger than hate. Then the light of the resurrection can shine in our hearts and we can take it into a world that is longing for good news.