

Along the track

Easter Joy

It is not unusual to see in the media Christians being described as curmudgeons. Curmudgeons are defined as grumps, with little or no tolerance, at times self-righteous and not suffering fools gladly, full of stubborn ideas or opinions. If others see us that way, if that is how our ways of living and our beliefs come across, what a travesty that is! There is a saying that Christians are "so heavenly minded they are no earthly good." Sadly, people of faith, those who follow a religious tradition are often portrayed as serious, humourless, out of step with the 'modern' world. We are not seen as people of joy. That's a great pity. The resurrection reminds us that we are called to work in the here and now, to make this world a better place, a fairer place, a happier place, to work to bring about the New Creation, to be Good News people. In the words of Pope Francis:

"The great Paul VI said that we cannot carry the Gospel forward with Christians who are sad, disheartened, discouraged. We cannot do it. This attitude like we're at a funeral. So many Christians have expressions like they're going to a funeral procession rather than going to praise God, right? They don't realize that from joy comes praise...."
Pope Francis May 2013

For many people, the resurrection is about 'the next life', and therefore salvation seems to be about something that will only happen when eventually we leave this vale of tears. But Christians believe in life before death too. The power of the Resurrection lies not only in the transformation of Jesus but in the transformation awaiting us who accept it. Because of the resurrection, a different world is not only possible, it has already begun! We have already been raised to a new life – we are part of the New Creation. The resurrection of Christ, then, is not only a promise of life after death but also a summons to what we must do today. We are very much of the modern world.

The Resurrection is about very basic, very real things. It is about seeing God in everyone, finding God everywhere, and responding to all of life as a message from God. It is not about escaping from this life but rather coming to know God present in us and around us, in others and in everything. People of the Resurrection are called to do every day whatever must be done to make God's vision come to life in this place, at this time, whatever the cost. In the words of Sr Joan Chittister: *the Resurrection goes on*

and on, every time Jesus rises in our own hearts in new ways, the Resurrection happens again. Every time we see Jesus where we did not recognize him before—in the faces of the poor, in the love of the unloved, in the revelatory moments of life, Jesus rises anew.

So our beliefs are about the now, the present not just about the afterlife.

They are about the wonder of the gift of life to the full and all that offers.

Our beliefs give meaning and purpose and thus they bring both hope and joy to life.

They bring freedom and responsibility rather than the lure of cynicism or despair.

The resurrection makes available to those who wish the kind of love and hope that comes when we believe that a different world is possible. So they offer the challenge to build a world of openness and dialogue, of fairness and justice, where generous love works to get the better of selfish interests.

So our daily acts of love, of forgiveness and compassion, our struggles for justice, our care and concern for each other, especially those who have no power, no voice all take on added meaning, added significance. Our patterns of prayer and faithfulness, tolerance and patience take on added potential. None of this daily effort, even suffering and hardship and every bit of good that we do, goes astray.

Pope Francis reminds us that Christ's resurrection is not an event of the past; something that happened to Jesus 2000 years ago. Rather it is a vital power, an irresistible force permeating the world. He reminds us that there are signs of resurrection everywhere transforming situations of injustice, evil, indifference and cruelty. He says: *"Where all seems to be dead, signs of the resurrection suddenly spring up. However dark things are, goodness always re-emerges and spreads"*. (EG 276). And we are instruments of that transformation. So don't deprive the world of the joyful message of the resurrection!

Regards
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