



2016 EASTER MESSAGE

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As we celebrate the great Easter mystery in this Jubilee Year of Mercy, I am reminded more forcefully than ever that Easter Sunday only makes sense in the light of Good Friday and Holy Saturday. We will begin to understand the beauty and mystery of the resurrection, only when we see it as part of the greater mystery of the Lord's life, death, resurrection and ascension to his Father in heaven.

Holy Saturday must have been a day of profound suffering and even despair for the disciples of Jesus. They had seen their beloved Master, the one in whom they had placed all their hopes, cruelly tortured and murdered before their eyes. For the repentant thief, however, Holy Saturday was the "first day" of his joy in the fulfilment of Jesus' promise: *Today you will be with me in paradise* (Luke 23:43). That promise was Jesus' response to the thief's own prayer: *Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom* (Luke 23:42). It was a response born of Jesus' merciful heart.

There is another prayer in St Luke's account of the death of Jesus. This time, it comes from Jesus Himself: *Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing* (Luke 23:34). This prayer, too, comes from the merciful heart of Jesus. In the midst of unimaginable suffering, we see Jesus with His mind and heart turned towards those who are seeking to destroy Him. He does so not in anger, or in a search for vengeance, but with merciful compassion and a burning desire that His murderers be forgiven.

In our tradition, it is we, all of us, who must number ourselves among those who bring Jesus to His death. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* expresses it this way: The Church has never forgotten that sinners were the authors and ministers of all the sufferings that the divine Redeemer endured... the Church does not hesitate to impute to Christians the gravest responsibility for the torments inflicted upon Jesus (CCC598).

The deadly power of our sins is met with divine mercy. Indeed, it is precisely our sinfulness, our self-centredness and our cruelty, which draws God's merciful gaze to us. He looks upon us, not with the eyes of an angry judge, but with those of a loving Father. This was the constant message of Jesus throughout His life.

During Jesus' lifetime, his message began to free his disciples from fear. The experience of Good Friday must have changed all that. Thrown into despair after His death, they must have thought, on that Holy Saturday, that it was "just too good to be true". It was the unbelievable event of the resurrection on Easter Sunday which convinced them that the extraordinary



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teaching of Jesus about the compassionate mercy of God was indeed true, beyond their wildest dreams.

This is what we celebrate at Easter. The resurrection assures us, in the most emphatic way imaginable, that God truly is as Jesus proclaims Him to be. He is a merciful, compassionate and forgiving God. He invites us, in the words of Jesus, to *come to me if you labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest* (Matthew 11:28).

May this invitation find an echo in your hearts as you celebrate Easter this year. And may the Lord's Easter gift of peace bring joy to you, your families and all those you love.

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