

Easter: True Encounter with Christ

Every Easter I'm drawn to reflect on the statement made by Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador, 40 years ago, a few days before he was assassinated by the Salvadoran government because of his outspoken criticism of its oppression and violence. In a radio address to the nation he said:

*I have frequently been threatened with death. As a Christian, I don't believe in death without resurrection; if they kill me – I will be resurrected in the Salvadoran people!*

One could travel today to the most remote areas of the Salvadoran country-side where the poorest-of-the-poor live, and stop in at any one of their humble homes, and find a picture of Archbishop Romero, usually with a vase of fresh wildflowers near it.

I talked with our friend Paul Welch from Catholic Charities, the other day. He and Sharon, his wife, just returned from visiting their son, Danny, who teaches in El Salvador. He shared that Archbishop Romero's presence is present everywhere they visited – still these forty years later. They visited the Chapel where he was shot and killed while celebrating mass – which is now a memorial – and found it crowded with *campesinos*, even at three o'clock on a Friday afternoon.

*... if they kill me I will be resurrected in the Salvadoran people!*

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Sisters and brothers, we gather remotely on this very unusual Easter with the Christian Community throughout the world, to proclaim to a struggling, hurting world that *we are Resurrection people*: we proclaim that Christ is risen, ...Christ lives and Christ continues to be. And, Like Archbishop Romero, we experience the Resurrection of Jesus within and among us when we love one another. We gather this Easter to proclaim the Gospel message that *Easter is God's "Yes" to Jesus against the powers that killed him* – imperial powers and principalities of oppression. The most widespread post-Easter affirmations about Jesus in the New Testament is "Jesus is Lord," and *if Jesus is Lord* – then *the powers of this world are not!* Easter affirms that the powers and principalities, systems of domination of the world are not of God and they don't have the final word.

To say: "*Jesus is Lord*" – means that *Caesar is not!* Imperial powers crucified Glory, but God raised Jesus and bestowed upon Jesus the name that is above every other name!

On this unusual Easter, we proclaim to our hurting and struggling world that: with the death and Resurrection of Jesus – *who now lives within and among us* – God's great clean-up of an unjust and violent world has begun; God's transfiguration of this earth has started; God's Resurrection of Mother Earth to become the world God intended from the beginning has begun – a world of justice and compassion, a world of equality and peace and love, a world where we recognize that we with all Creation are children of God and, thus, brothers and sisters... brother sun, sister moon; brother fire and sister water... ..

On this unusual Easter day we proclaim to our hurting and broken world that: through our Baptism and our day-to-day commitment to Jesus and Jesus' mission and vision, we are – with all people of goodwill – are now the hands and feet, the body of the Resurrected Jesus; together building the reign of God, the realm of God, the kin-dom of God on earth as in heaven.

The powerful words of St. Augustine say it all:

*“We, without God, cannot and God, without us, will not.”*

With the Resurrected Jesus, God's great clean-up of this earth has begun, but it will not happen without us!

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And so, sisters and brothers, what might this timeless Easter message say about our present reality..., our “now” moment, as we journey through this Covid-19 Pandemic – a crisis the depth of which most of us in our lifetime have never experienced?

First of all, it's becoming clearer and clearer that business-as-usual: ... ‘me-first;’ self-sufficiency, ‘us’ vs ‘them,’ narrow individualism and nationalism, ‘America-first,’ ... is incapable of defeating this virus. We need one another! No person – no city – no state – no nation, can handle this alone. As our Catholic Social Teaching so clearly states: we must all focus on the common good. That is the vision that Jesus was so passionate about – that ultimately led to his passion and death on the Cross – because he rocked the boat of business-as-usual. We are all in this together.

On the first Holy Thursday Passover, Jesus modeled what true leadership, what true authority, is all about: on his knees, washing the disciples' feet, Jesus shows us that authentic leadership is service. We're learning quickly in this time of deep trial, that facts matter, as does character and empathy in our leaders. We're learning quickly, how dangerous it is when clueless leaders alienate and demean experts and dedicated public servants, sowing seeds of division for their own gain. This isn't leadership, it is evil.

Sisters and brothers, in the midst of this crisis there are glimpses of Resurrection and these glimpses are the countless sisters and brothers throughout our community, our state, our nation, and our world – some sacrificing their own lives – for the sake of all brothers and sisters: the doctors, nurses and other medical personnel; the world's scientific community, the essential utilities and communications workers, postal workers, store clerks, bus drivers, educators, DPW folks, government workers, gas station attendants, the press; farm-workers; all of us sheltering in place and the list goes on... .

Ultimately, the Good Friday of this virus will birth into Easter and when all is said and done, the world might just be a little more like the world God intended.

And so, as disciples of Jesus on this unusual Easter, let us continue to support one another with prayer and hope – knowing that ultimately *all will be well!*

Thomas Merton puts it well in an Easter reflection, in words that are so pertinent for the days we are living through:

*True encounter with Christ liberates something in us, a power we didn't know we had, a hope, a capacity for life, a resilience and ability to fight back when we thought we were defeated; a capacity to grow and change.*

*For the Christian there is no defeat – because Christ is risen and lives in and among us and Christ has overcome all that seeks to destroy us!*

Amen! Alleluia!