

EASTER SUNDAY 2025

If I was waking up this Easter Sunday in Gaza, or Ukraine or in Myanmar. If I found myself in Nigeria where in the past week 200 Christians have been killed which adds to the 20,000 killed in the last ten years, 145 of these being priests, would I still have hope? Would I still proclaim with conviction: He is risen?

Or, perhaps if I were starting the day having slept in the doorway of Boots, WH Smiths or any other shop doorway in the UK because I was one of the 354,000 homeless. If I was to find myself this morning in A&E having been beaten up, sexually assaulted or facing a terminal illness would I still be able to say: He has risen?

What would my viewpoint be if I had not spent this weekend in a safe place, with good food, nice people and beautiful liturgy? Would Christ still be alive for me? Would I still consider myself a pilgrim of hope?

Pope Benedict asked as much in his last encyclical which became in fact the first encyclical of Pope Francis: *Lumen Fidei* – The Light of Faith – they teach us:

“Christians know that suffering cannot be eliminated, yet it can have meaning and become an act of love and entrustment into the hands of God who does not abandon us; in this way it can serve as a moment of growth in faith and love... Faith is not a light which scatters all our darkness, but a lamp which guides our steps in the night and suffices for the journey. To those who suffer God does not provide arguments which explain everything; rather, his response is that of an accompanying presence, a history of goodness which touches every story of suffering and opens up a ray of light.”

Friends, I am not a man of hope because life is easy or because there are no difficulties or challenges or painful choices in my life. I am a man of hope because with Jesus I know that my failures, difficulties and the obstacles I face will not and cannot ever define who I am. The present turmoil or pain I experience will not imprison me. And the uncertainty and trials of the future will be manageable because He is alive, and I choose to live in Him. I know the Trinity holds me in an eternal embrace of love and Mary and all the saints walk with me. So my fears never rob me of faith.

For if I have learnt anything in life, I have learnt this. To live is to be open to the possibility that I will suffer either in my body, or emotionally or spiritually. Suffering is a fact of life that I cannot avoid. How I choose to live with and through that suffering is a choice, a choice that is mine alone to make.

If Joseph of Arimathea or Nicodemus had not chosen to plead for the body of Jesus from Pilate he would have been cast into a pit with the rest of the criminal dead in the valley of Gehena. These two men saved the day by the choice they made and so Jesus was buried in a garden tomb. Why is that significant? And what part does it play in our being pilgrims of hope?

The garden was after all where our problems began, and it was a tree that was our stumbling block and the bad choice made by a virgin, Eve. St John Chrysostom speaks beautifully of the fact that a garden, a tree and a virgin, Mary became the instruments that God used to restore and renew us. And this happened on the third day. Why the third day? Think about it. On what day were the

trees created by God – on the third day. When did Yeshua die at 3.00pm in the afternoon, so when did he rise, on the third day. All this was part of the messianic prophesy. Listen to Hosea 5:1-2:

*“Come, let us return to the Lord; for he has torn us, that he may heal us;
he has struck us down, and he will bind us up.*

After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.”

In Jewish tradition the third day is the day of resurrection, restoration and redemption. Hence on the third day after Passover there was the festival of Yom HaBikkuim i.e. the festival of first fruits. So, you see why Paul in I Corinthians 15: 20 writes: *“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.”* He is the first fruit, therefore; there will be other fruits and that is why we have hope we are through baptism that other fruit. What happened to Jesus will happen to us. Listen to James 1:18: *“he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.”*

But friends there is something else. Sunday in the Hebrew tradition is the eighth day, the day of new beginnings. Eight in the Jewish tradition is the day of transcendence, it is the day of breakthrough, the day of circumcision, eight is a number that causes us to rise above our situations and circumstances and have hope, eight points beyond this world. And if all that is not enough what is mind blowing is that both Hebrew and Greek are alphanumerical languages, that is the letters have a numerical value. So, guess what the name of Jesus adds up in Greek: 888. He transcends all.

I began these Triduum reflections by reminding us that JESUS IS HERE. We do not believe in an absentee God, but in a God who has made His home with us, a God who is ever present to us. We saw in the liturgy of the Passion the lamb of God salted and wrapped from birth ready to give Himself for us, a lamb of sacrifice who yesterday evening we proclaimed to be the lion of Judah, the light of the world, the hope that sets us free. Love so amazing, so divine.

We are people of Hope. Because hope has set his seal upon us and He has transmitted that hope to us. He lives within us. In a particular way I would like to address those words to all the young people here. You have been, by your presence, a tremendous source of hope to me and, I am sure, to others as well. As I have looked at you these days and prayed and fasted for you, my prayer has been that you will be strong and clear witnesses of faith and hope to your generation and to others. Your message is simple: Jesus is alive, and he longs for us to experience life to the full. As Carlos Acutis, soon to be canonised once said: *“What does it matter if you can win a thousand battles if you cannot win against your own corrupt passions? The real battle is with ourselves...The more Eucharist we receive the more we will become like Jesus, so that on earth we will have a foretaste of heaven.”*

My young friends, in the recent Dimpleby lecture given by Sir Garth Southgate, one time manager of England, he highlighted the dangers that you come up against due to the unrelenting impact of social media. The many false and manipulative messages that try to win your minds and shape your choices. Many of these, I believe have a satanic source that seek to steal, kill and destroy the good news of Jesus from you. Grath Southgate put forward a clear message in his lecture and that was the need to build belief and find resilience in this demanding world. As young Catholic Christians you have a faith that will guide you a faith that will never let you down. Cling to that faith, learn about that faith and get to know the Jesus who is your only source of resilience and hope. You are an inspiration.

And so are you older disciples of Jesus. Thank you for your presence, your friendship and your loyalty which has deeply blessed us as a monastic community. Thank you in a special way to the Arcadians who for thirty years have enhanced our liturgy, we are as a community so very grateful. Thank you to our family of Oblates who support us in many ways and whose cleaning and service during this Triduum has been of immense help. We are grateful today that today Rowan and Robert will make their final act of oblation and strengthen the ever-growing army of lay Benedictines who transmit hope.

Jesus is alive and He is here. I pray that you will leave this place today full of hope because you have encountered hope Himself.

Christ is risen; He is risen indeed

Abbot Robert Igo, OSB

20 April 2025