

**Holy Mass for Easter, the Resurrection of Our Lord
(Venezia, Basilica of St. Mark - 27 March 2016)
Homily by the Patriarch, Monsignor Francesco Moraglia**

Beloved,

The words "*the Lord is risen!*" resound in this Year of Mercy in a special way in our communities. Easter is an event in which God's mercy takes the form of the cross; it is, therefore, a mercy - as the Apostle Paul recalls - "*with a great price*" (1 Corinthians 6:20).

The Fourth Gospel uses the image of wheat falling into the ground and says: "*... unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains only a single seed; but if it dies, it produces many seeds*" (John 12:24).

Easter is the outcome of a double "yes", that of the Son and that of the Father; it is from the glorious cross that the renewal of humanity springs.

The joint "yes" of the Father and of the Son provokes the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The Fourth Gospel constantly emphasizes the fact that Jesus, right at the moment of his death, "*bowed his head and gave up his spirit*" (John 19:30). Thus the Spirit - who is the Spirit of the Father and of the Son - right from the moment of Jesus' death was available for the salvation of the world.

Easter represents both forgiveness and joy, is the true innovation that shapes the world, beginning with the human heart. What sin had deformed and destroyed, at Easter, takes shape again and regenerates. Easter is the light that shines and pierces the darkness and ultimately bestows grace upon all who await it, who are powerless to obtain it by human effort alone.

The mercy of God enters, in this way, into history and, from that moment, everything is reborn, everything takes on new life. Easter resembles a spring morning; is a beginning, which is manifested by the novelty of an unexpected encounter, which however, is real and which takes place in the real world; it is not the projection of an easily-influenced or suggestible ego.

Easter is the encounter with the Crucified and Risen One who brings joy to his disciples and sends them on a mission: "... Jesus stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you ". Having said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, "*Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.*" *And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.*" (John 20: 19-23).

Let us return then, to the Easter themes of joy and mercy and it is Jesus, the Risen One, who gives the Spirit for the forgiveness of sins. The Risen Christ commands his disciples to precede him and, thus, the mercy of the Crucified and Risen One is stronger than the sin of mankind and the world.

Easter is manifested through the "reality" of the meeting; yes, the dynamic of the meeting - between the Risen Christ and the disciples - Easter, effectively, is the reality of such a meeting, in which he who died came back to life, and one who had suffered defeat came to

the fullness of life; but - it is worth pointing out - the Risen One has not merely returned to his previous life, he has now entered the fullness of life, where death has no more power. The third Gospel tells us that on Easter morning the heavenly messengers (the angels) admonished the women not to look among the dead for one who was alive (see Luke 24, 5)

At Easter, then, you cannot seek the living one among the dead, and the sequence of the liturgy proclaims: "*Yes, we are certain: Christ is truly risen. Oh victorious King, bring us your salvation*". And the Resurrection appearances allow us to overcome the ambiguities of the empty tomb. Only through these appearances (genuine experiences of meeting the Lord) can any possible misunderstanding be dissolved; the appearances introduce the disciples to the faith which is based precisely on the reality of the Lord who has conquered death.

At Easter, the disciples' eyes no longer see only the material reality that is before them; no, their eyes are opened to the evidence of the faith that, certainly, does not exclude the material reality but goes beyond it and grasps its meaning, starting from the event of Jesus seen in the totality of his death and resurrection.

In this way we are able to consider the real connection between the earthly life of Jesus (love / death) and his glorification, the work of the Father; not an ordinary glorification, but one that involves the flesh and blood of the Son as He had been revealed to his disciples.

On Easter morning, John ran faster than Peter and reached the tomb before him but waited for him; they entered and only after looking at everything inside did they believe (see John 20.3 - 9).

The linen cloths and the shroud folded separately provide, together with the story of Jesus (his gestures and his words) and the Scriptures, the only plausible answer, and can explain the truth of the Jesus Event, his resurrection; he is truly risen, he has conquered death.

Thus the disciples did not simply come into a new "space" of the story that had not yet been explored, but entered a totally new reality, the true reality, the total reality, the ultimate reality which is the fulfilment of history itself: *éschaton*, and hence eschatology, means just that. In eschatology the past, the present and the future are surpassed in the accomplishment of a fulfilment that can no longer be divided by the passage of time.

What matters now is to perceive the *presence* of the Risen One, rather than searching for an opportunity; the One through whom all living things were created and redeemed is now the One who given the gift of eternal life, which is both the *present state* and the *future promise* of the Christian life.

Joy is the clarion call of Easter. For the Christian, Easter gives joy not for personal reasons relating to oneself and which one is celebrating; the Christian, in actual fact, may at Easter find himself in situations where he has no reason to rejoice and which may well be, for him, dark and dramatic. Despite this Easter is, for all of us, the bringer of real joy because the Christian is able to look forward to both his own future and that of the whole world because, at Easter, salvation is objectively given in the Risen Jesus.

To believe in the resurrection does not mean closing our eyes to the present reality; rather at Easter, it takes on new depth, length and height; depth, length and height that go beyond the narrow human possibilities and, therefore, beyond the injustices and dramas of history.

Not surprisingly, the second reading today, from the epistle to the Colossians (3: 1-4) – places us in a dimension that, for the disciple, is totally new. In fact, the Apostle writes, "*you have been raised with Christ*" and then quickly adds "*your life is hidden with Christ in God.*" We should meditate, appropriate and translate these words into our lives, where the faithful can discover the reality which springs from the fulfilment of the Word of God in the same risen Jesus Christ.

It is no coincidence that Paul uses the verb in the present tense: "*you have been raised with Christ*" and "*your life is hidden with Christ in God.*" This means that the disciple of the Lord, at Easter and the Resurrection is projected into God's sphere where everything and everyone reaches fulfilment. At Easter the objectivity of Christ is recorded in the subjectivity of the disciples; so, on this day, "it happens;" that which according to the everyday world is unlikely or, rather, impossible.

At Easter, the Christian is called to assume a different conduct – in fact this is too simple a description – better to say, to live the new life, the true life that begins in the act of faith and baptism, the life that participates in the wisdom of God.

The "yes" and "no" of the Christian life, that is the discernment and wisdom of those who lived the events of the first Easter, bear witness to the roots of our faith. This is not - as the Gospel warns us - to sew new patches on a worn-out suit, but, rather, using another image taken from the Gospel, to wear the wedding garment without which you cannot attend the banquet with the Bridegroom.

The essential point is that the Christian life is a life of faith founded in Easter, a life born from the encounter with the Risen Lord such as happened to Peter, to John, to Andrew, or through the mediation of the faith of the Church; as Jesus said to Thomas: "*Put your finger here and see my hands ... Do not doubt, but believe.*" Thomas answered him, "*My Lord and my God!*" Jesus said to him: "*Because you have seen me, you have believed: blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed*" (John 20: 27-29).

Putting on the wedding garment demands the faith of Easter and this is the great effort to which both the individual disciple and the entire Christian community are called to pursue. Faith is a gift of freedom; it is, therefore, a free choice which cannot be separated from the risks which freedom brings with it.

We must grow in humanity because only by journeying to the limits of our humanity, touching the very limits, can we arrive to where all with one voice speak of God and man; and we will find that we are a part of a much greater project, and that we are in the hands of One who is not the cold watchmaker of the universe, but the Father of Jesus, the Risen One.

The Gospel asks the Christian community to face up to events which are, humanly speaking, unforeseeable and, indeed, unlikely. And it is from this point that we begin to develop the consciousness of faith.

Mary Magdalene, Peter and John represent the original Christian community; in them we can see the labour and toil needed to reach the state of intense faith which is not intended as an

ideological response or consolation but as something more: more true, more authentic and more in keeping with the unexpected reality that is presented in front of them. Nothing is taken for granted, whether for ideology or for comfort; on the contrary, everything is left to the free will of the disciples and everyone has their own ways to get to the "yes" of faith. The journey of Mary Magdalene is not that of John, that of John is not that of Peter.

The apostle Paul - as we have seen – exhorts us to seek the things that are above, those things for which the Christian life is marked both by the "already" and the "not yet"; the Christian life is profoundly attentive to this penultimate reality, seen through the eyes of the Risen One, cared for by his own hands and loved with his own heart.

According to the logic of the final judgment, as Matthew states: *"... inherit the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world, because I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me "* (Matthew 25, 34-36).

We are called, both as individual disciples and as an entire community, to become more and more the Church of the Risen Lord. Pope Francis asks us, in particular, to take the five verbs that express what the Church is and what it contains within it - that is to say, go out, announce, live, educate, transfigure - and so rethink our lives as disciples of the Risen One.

It is a good thing to be open in faith to Jesus, the Risen One, following - as disciples and communities - the Pauline: imperatives "seek the things that are above" and "incline your thoughts on things above" (Colossians 3: 1-2) keeping our gaze fixed on the things of this world but transforming them, namely having the confidence to seize them in their truest human qualities.

So for the Christian - as the Apostle Paul recalls - it's about living a time that now is short so *"...those who have wives should live as if they are unmarried; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away."* (1Corinthians 7, 29-31).

I wish for all of you an "Easter" faith, both the capacity to meet Jesus Christ - the risen Christ – and the ability to proclaim this to others.