

Living Out Easter

By Santiago Lange



Jesus' disciples were not gathering on the first Easter morning to welcome Him back from the grave. Blurred momentarily was His promise that on the third day He would rise from the tomb. The apostle Paul would later write in his letter to the Corinthians that Christ has conquered death, the final enemy. But, it is clear such was not the expectation of His friends and disciples on that first Easter morning. Their hearts were heavy with grief and disappointment.

The disciples had forgotten Jesus' promise that He would come back to them. All they knew was that their Lord was dead and with Him all their hopes, dreams, and aspirations. They were overwhelmed with their sense of loss. But that, of course, is not the end of the story. If it were, we would not have any hope. The women made their way to the tomb early in the morning to prepare the body with spices. There they found the stone rolled away from the grave and two men in shining apparel who said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? Remember how He told you, while He was still in Galilee, that the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise?" And they remembered Jesus' words, and they returned to tell the eleven disciples and the rest of Jesus' followers, "He is alive! He is alive! He has conquered death as He said."

But what DOES Easter mean in our lives? Doesn't it mean, first of all, that we no longer have to fear death? We are often bewildered in our attitude toward mortality. But we were created for life, not destruction. No one who is healthy of mind and body looks forward to dying. And of course, that is the point. God did not bring us into being for this world only. Christ showed us that death is not an invincible foe. Death has been conquered. Because Christ lives we, too, shall live.

Easter also shows us that we no longer need to fear living. What use is life if we lose our dignity as human beings? There are things in this world more precious to us than our lives. What does Easter have to say to us as we face our daily challenges with its heartaches and disappointments, its hurts and frustrations? It says above all that God is involved in His world. The God of the empty tomb is also the God of the Exodus. God is not off somewhere far removed from the human condition. The God of the Bible is intimately involved with His creation. For the Christian dying is a momentary inconvenience. But it does not interrupt a relationship with God through Jesus Christ that was begun long before.

The sad Christian is the one who believes that faith is simply buying a ticket to some far-off heaven. Such faith can quickly lead to oppressing legalism. Christian faith is an ultimate love affair with True Life.

God is transcendent but also immanent in the world. He enters into history. He even became one of US. Easter is about victory, not about doom and despair. We share in that joy. Easter is the celebration of that triumphant reality. But Easter also tells us that people do matter.

Why is it important to believe in the resurrection of the dead? Certainly, it is not only so that we can believe in God. There are people who believe in God who do not believe in Easter. Therefore, God's power and His omnipotence are not really at stake. What IS at stake is whether OUR lives have any meaning, value and hope. Do we live only for a season, then cease to exist forever? Or are we so significant in God's eyes that even death cannot separate us from His love? The Resurrection is in one very real sense all about US! As Christians every day ought to be for us a Spirit guided reflection of our Easter faith.

So, how might „living out Easter“ look like? We are given an ancient yet very telling glimpse in a „letter“ to a certain „Diognetus“. The sender, identified as „Mathetes“ in the fifth chapter of his epistle, describes to a „curious inquirer“ „living out Easter“ as follows...

„For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity. The course of conduct which they follow has not been devised by any speculation or deliberation of inquisitive men; nor do they, like some, proclaim themselves the advocates of any merely human doctrines. But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life. They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. They marry, as do all [others]; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives. They love all men, and are persecuted by all. They are unknown and condemned; they are put to death, and restored to life. They are poor, yet make many rich; they are in lack of all things, and yet abound in all; they are dishonoured, and yet in their very dishonour are glorified. They are evil spoken of, and yet are justified; they are reviled, and bless; they are insulted, and repay the insult with honour; they do good, yet are punished as evil-doers. When punished, they rejoice as if quickened into life; they are assailed by the Jews as foreigners, and are persecuted by the Greeks; yet those who hate them are unable to assign any reason for their hatred“.

The Easter faith is not just a one day event, it is OUR daily Christian expression. It is the conviction that people matter so much to God that He gave His own Son in our behalf; that He allowed Him to be crucified on the cross for our sins and on the third day raised Him from the grave as sign and symbol that our lives are of eternal significance. Easter is both thought and life changing in this world and in the world to come.

May the love of God fill our hearts and touch those around us as we live out daily our Easter faith. □

The Letter to Diognetus is an early Christian apologetic work probably dating from the 2nd or 3rd century AD. It is often included with the works of the Apostolic Fathers, Greek Christian writers of the late 1st and early 2nd centuries, but it more accurately is associated with the early Apologists (primarily 1st century). Both the person addressed and the author of the work are unknown, although at one time the apologist Justin Martyr was erroneously considered the author. The work survived antiquity in one 13th–14th-century manuscript, which was destroyed by fire in Straßbourg Fr., in 1870.

Source: The Encyclopaedia Britannica