

**2011 EASTER MESSAGE
CHRIST IS RISEN, ALLELUIA!**

A few weeks ago, we saw the suffering in Japan that followed the earthquake, tsunami and threat of nuclear radiation. The world held its breath and hurried to help. For the Japanese, nothing would ever be the same. From now on people would tell each other where they were when the earthquake struck. And how all these happenings had changed their lives. The Bible describes the Paschal Mystery—the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—as just such a moment, one of epic proportions and shattering significance. Two earthquakes revealed that the end times had broken into our world. The evangelist Matthew tells us that at Jesus' death and again at his resurrection the earth shook (Matthew 27.54; 28.2). We are not informed of the magnitude of these seismic movements, only that they touched people's lives profoundly.

On Calvary, when the centurion and those with him keeping watch over Jesus saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified. Then they confessed, 'Truly this man was God's Son!' On Easter morning after the earthquake, the guards shook and became like dead men when the angel rolled back the stone from the tomb. The angel urged the women who had come to anoint the body of their Lord not to fear. Jesus the crucified, he announced, had risen. They were to go and report this to his disciples. Our faith experience should parallel that of the women and disciples who, on encountering the risen Lord, became believers. Filled with the Holy Spirit, they began spreading the Good News of God's love and forgiveness. The news of Jesus' resurrection, when it touches peoples' lives, has similar effects. First the experience of the Risen Lord shakes us up. Then it challenges us to share the news we have come to believe. Such sharing of the Christian message will be difficult in a culture like ours. Our current world circumstances require us to conceive of a new way of evangelizing—spreading the Good News revealed in Jesus Christ. Some people we meet seem to have been immunized against the Christian faith. Perhaps earlier on in their lives they got a mild and ineffective dose of the Christian story, which they took to be the real thing. Unimpressed, they turned away, looking elsewhere for meaning and purpose in life.

Ours is not an easy world in which to speak the message of Jesus, who summons us to a new way of being free from all that holds us in bondage. Knowing Christ changes us to the core of our being! I see this whenever I hear young people speak of the transformation Christ works in their lives each day. Older people, too, tell what happens to them when notions about God, Christ and the Church become real. We should realize that none of the people of our world are completely resistant to grace, to the beautiful message of Jesus, and to examples we can give of genuine service and forgiving love. This should give us hope at Easter and help our resolve to proclaim Christ where we study, work and play. It helps to recall how the Christian message spread rapidly in the ancient Roman Empire—one at times officially hostile to Christianity—in a society which was much more cruel and uncaring, violent and sexually chaotic than today's society. The Good News of the Kingdom, Christ and his message can still bring healing, health and peace. In all our struggles and disappointments, we must remember this and dare to proclaim what we have seen, heard and touched through the liturgy, in God's word and in the sacrament of our Easter communion. May God give all Christ's followers zeal to share the Good News we have received as God's gift! Happy Easter!

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