

**Easter Holy Mass to celebrate the Resurrection of the Lord
(Venice, Cathedral Basilica of St Mark - April 16, 2016)
Homily of the Patriarch, Msgr. Francesco Moraglia.**

Dear friends,

The Easter proclamation: "The Lord is risen!" which has spread around the world from Jerusalem, is the result of a long journey which could not be taken for granted, with which Jesus made ready his disciples and, especially, the apostles.

This path reached a key moment when, on Mount Tabor, Jesus was transfigured before Peter, James and John, who made up the inner circle of the Twelve. At the end of the Theophany, Jesus asks them not to say anything about what they had seen and heard before He was resurrected from the dead (cf. Mk 9,2-10, Mt 17,1-9, Lk 9,28 to 36). Peter, James and John are the same apostles who, only a short time later, would observe at close hand the agony of Jesus in Gethsemane.

On Mount Tabor, Jesus showed them a small part of His divine glory reflected in his mortal body; as well as seeing the light, the gospels say they heard the voice of the Father: "... This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him" (Mk 9,7).

The Transfiguration reveals the person of Jesus in a very particular way; but it is not the only time when this happens. We can think, for example, of his baptism in the River Jordan, and also of the discourses in which Jesus speaks of his Resurrection.

Jesus performed so many acts that herald the resurrection: think of the miracles in which Jesus healed bodily suffering, and again those in which he restored life; Jairus' daughter, the widow of Nain's son, Lazarus.

Yet despite this, the women and the apostles were not able to face up to the dramatic events of the Passion and death of Jesus and, when on Easter morning, they went to the tomb, they were unprepared, unable to read that what they saw before their eyes was the fulfillment of what Jesus had told them. The beginning of the Gospel passage which has just been read is eloquent:

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. 2 So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" (John 20, 1-2)

Yes, they do not know where he has been put. This is the sad and forlorn conclusion of Mary Magdalene and the other women with her.

Yet there are those who say they want facts and evidence, the twentieth century positivists are one example but many of us today say the same, close their eyes to all evidence when they do not find what their prejudice is expecting.

It is thus completely inexplicable according to the testimony of one of its greatest exponents, Ernest Renan, except by an invincible prejudice that believes the supernatural to be absurd - prejudicially considered impossible. As Renan says it is embarrassing support for a critique that wants to be real and objective and also up to date:

".... *The strong imagination of Mary Magdalene had a part to play in this key matter. Power of divine love! the passion of a hallucinatory woman raises a God in the world!*" (E. Renan, *Vita di Gesù*, Feltrinelli, Milano 1972, p. 181).

Thus the triumph of this pre-judgment is that it disregards that which is attested to in documentary evidence, and would rather build an unlikely argument based upon nothing, or rather upon prejudice. There is a need for a hermeneutic which might euphemistically be described as uninhibited; but, as we know, before the prejudice of those who consider themselves free from prejudice, nothing has value unless their prejudice can be guaranteed.

In many cases, believers display better reasoning than those who have made themselves ideological champions and defenders of a reason that declares what they do not understand to be absurd; what would have been the history of science if it had applied this procedure in respect to what it did not yet know?

It is important for any disciple of the Lord who intends to be a culturally reliable interlocutor, to be able to respond to those who question the reasons for hope (1 Peter 3:15). This is a fact because of its reliability in other areas, and, as we know, Christian faith / hope begins on the morning of Easter Sunday with the reality of the resurrection of Jesus.

The Easter liturgical season which begins today is a time not only to celebrate and live the Easter of Our Lord but also, as the apostle Peter calls upon us - in his first letter - in order to give reasons for hope.

Living the Easter message means living in the spirit of Mercy: counselling the dubious and teaching those who doubt or do not know the issues of faith - first and foremost the resurrection and eternal life; it means being an outgoing Church which announces, lives, educates and transforms.

The Easter of Jesus anticipates the common destiny of both the cosmos and of history, and asks to be introduced through subsequent human choices into the reality of everyday life. Easter is, above all, in the words of the Lord's Prayer an invocation, "... *Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is heaven,...*" (Mt 5, 10; Lk 11: 2).

Ultimately, Easter also challenges us as citizens to engage in establishing a good relationship on a personal, social and political level with truth and justice, with the aim of reconciliation and in the belief that no war has ever solved problems but has most likely overdriven at least one of the two parties in the conflict; thus it is Roman peace, the *pax romana*, instead of peace that is the result of justice. Nor should one espouse the ideology

of pacifism which, in many people, creates a belief that they are superior to others and expresses an auto-referentiality which separates individuals rather than uniting them.

Easter, however, is fulfilled in the coming of the Holy Spirit, Pentecost, by way of the communion, dialogue, concord and unity that are exactly the opposite of the spirit of Babel, whose immaterial principle is division, fracture, enmity. At Easter the effort of disciples and Christian communities should be to translate the gift of the Holy Spirit into concrete personal, social, institutional and political relationships.

It is time to reconstruct modernity in a way that knows how to hold together what until now has been viewed in a manner which, even if it is not one of conflict, is also not one of sharing.

We are called in this way, to rethink - and in some ways - to replenish the socio-cultural context in which we live. This does not mean thinking in confrontational terms such as "tolerance", "passion for truth", "profound convictions." We must nurture a thoughtful "love for one's own identity", so that these words will not show up as incompatible to each other in reality.

Pluralism - which increasingly shapes our advanced societies - in itself cannot, as such, be considered as an element that undermines people's lives or social, political and religious institutions; it certainly can become so if it is allowed to feed the drift that reduces all values to pure subjectivism and flattens everything into a radical relativism.

I repeat that "tolerance", "passion for truth", "deep convictions" and a thoughtful "love for one's own identity" are not antithetical concepts from each other but, on the contrary, they are able to integrate and intended to mutually enrich each other.

The rapid and profound cultural and social change that has been in progress for decades has increased insecurity and the feeling of instability that characterize modern social relations. And this uncertainty leads to the pursuit of individual solutions before common needs; thus it is a question of redefining the dynamics of social action.

It is from this perspective that I appeal to all people of good will, beyond their religious beliefs, their ethnic groups and cultures and I want to do it today, the day on which Christians celebrate the festival par excellence in which they extol the liberation from fear, hatred, violence and sin.

In recent days we have all been shocked by the terrorist acts that have sown death and which the media have reported in a tragic sequence. Now is a time when we are called to overcome the various states of fear, temptation to flee, desire for revenge.

The Christian community - in this Easter season - must call out, with greater force, in the heart of its members and in their social relationships, the good news that Jesus is the risen, living among us, giving peace and hope and walking with us along the roads of history asking us to play our part, both as believers and as citizens.

Let us look with the Christian virtue of fortitude upon the latest dramatic events in Syria, Stockholm and Christian communities in Egypt (including that of Alexandria, very dear to us Venetians because of our shared reference-point, St Mark), not forgetting the painful events which have happened in other parts of the world where many are persecuted for reasons of faith; in 2016 alone ninety thousand Christians were killed for their faith in Jesus.

Terrorism is in fact a "war" that has spread worldwide, elusive and uncontrollable; a war "in pieces", in the words of Pope Francis.

We Venetians, feeling great relief that we have escaped serious danger thanks to the actions of the judiciary and law enforcement officers, have realized that our city is no stranger to this movement. And we have felt, on our skin, that sense of being dramatically "at risk", in common with many other parts of the world.

Yet, at the same time as the terrorist acts, the olive branches that were raised as a sign of joy and peace in our communities, at the beginning of Holy Week, have indicated the need, the firm will and - I would say - the courage of peace to discover the profound meaning of life and stand together once again; thus a choice is offered that is not only one of faith but also a cultural and social choice. Fear does not give clarity, fear does not protect a community, fear is never a constructive proposal.

At Easter we are thus called upon to make room for the sole Word which is able to raise us and to uproot us from fear, "*Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself!"*" (Luke ch 24; 36 – 39)

The path of the Christian is, therefore, in liberation from every kind of fear to run towards the Lord, risen and alive! Let us meet him, just as it happened on that magnificent and extraordinary day at the well of Sychar, where Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman "*a word to her desire for true love, to free her from everything that obscured her life and be guided by it to the full joy of the Gospel*" (Pope Francis, *Amoris laetitia* n. 294).

The feast of Easter - the heart of Christianity - is the opportunity that is given to us through Grace and which demands from all of us, humility and readiness for conversion, to pass from death to life, from darkness to light, from falsehood to truth, from hatred to unconditional love.

"*Christ, my hope, is risen*": may the Easter proclamation reach everyone, especially those who are marked by suffering and the worries of life.

I wish everyone a Happy Easter of truth, justice, and most of all peace!