



2019 Easter Message
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Christ is Risen! Alleluia!

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Risen Christ.

On 21-24 February 2019, I attended a Meeting on the Protection of Minors in Rome which was called for by Pope Francis for all of the Presidents of Bishops' Conferences across the world. It was likewise suggested that prior to the event, the Bishops could meet with persons who had been abused by clergy. Some asked to meet with me here in Canada and others in Rome. I thanked all of them wholeheartedly for their stories. I was deeply moved at hearing their pain and how it continues to affect their lives, their families and their communities. Their suffering reflects the mystery of the Cross of Christ that makes itself present today in many varied ways.

In addition, during the Meeting, we listened to other testimonies of victims of those traumatic abuses. One testimony touched me deeply, that of a mother who, abused as a child, had managed to rebuild the best life possible. She described how, at the birth of her first child, the pain experienced at the time of the abuse resurfaced, a pain more intimate and more intense than the very pain of giving birth. While acknowledging the suffering, she nonetheless also spoke of the experience of giving birth with the beautiful Spanish expression "dar a luz" (to give to light). As I considered the joy she felt at her newborn as well as the expression "to give to light," I was led to consider the Pascal Mystery in a new way. This is illustrated particularly in the Gospel of John 16:21, where Jesus, in order to foretell his suffering, death and resurrection, uses the metaphor of a woman in childbirth who having endured excruciating pain, suddenly experiences immense joy at the birth of her baby. Ultimately, the memory of the pain dissolves to absolute elation as she holds her newborn child in her arms. The expression "dar a luz" reminds us of "The Light of Christ" sung three times out of the darkness at the Paschal Vigil as a sign that Christ, Light of the world, rises in glory out of the tomb in order to dispel the darkness of our hearts and minds. This is the joy and the light that Easter brings. On Easter and because of Easter, new light shines through and new life comes forth.

For those who witnessed Jesus' crucifixion, death and burial, it was an experience of darkness and despair. The horrific pain that Jesus suffered left his followers helpless and hopeless. That Jesus would be nailed to a cross and left to die was unthinkable and unbearable. Then, on the third day after his crucifixion, just as their sorrow peaked, Scripture tells us that Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene, then to the disciples of Emmaus and finally to the apostles, who had retreated out of fear and sadness, to learn the good news that He had risen and was living.

In our own time we are experiencing the darkness of the tomb as the Catholic Church acknowledges the pain and suffering of countless minors who were sexually abused by clergy and consecrated persons. This sinful and criminal behaviour by some members of the Church has uncovered an evil that permeates every corner of the world today. Most regrettably, sexual abuse takes place in the home, in schools, in sports organizations and in other contexts. It is indeed a social problem. However, in his final address to the Bishops gathered in Rome for the meeting on the Protection of Minors in the Church, Pope Francis stated, unequivocally, that the evil of sexual exploitation and the abuse of children must be eradicated from the Church. Let us be clear: there is no place in the Church for those who harm children. Sexual abuse is always an abuse of power and children are vulnerable to this power particularly when the perpetrator is someone the child trusts. Sexual abuse is committed by adults whose responsibility it is to love and nurture children in holistic and healthy ways.

How do we as the People of God respond to this crisis? Where is our hope in the midst of this scandal? Are we, like Mary Magdalene and the disciples, paralyzed by doubt, fear and pain? Can we allow ourselves to be open to the hope, and yes, the light and the joy that the Risen Christ brings? Can we find healing, reconciliation, redemption and freedom as we immerse ourselves in the joy of the resurrection of Christ?

We are called to humbly place our trust in God's promise that evil, sin and death will not have the last word on the human experience. As men and women of faith, who hold on to the promises of eternal life, our excruciating pain, suffering and confusion can give way to tremendous joy. From the reality of sin and evil, we are introduced into goodness and grace, holiness and life. With Easter the darkness of the tomb is transformed by the light of the resurrection. The Pascal Mystery is clearly present in many ways today: the suffering of death and the joy of life; the passage of Christ from the tomb to eternity and the passage from the pain of child abuse to the experience of healing.

Christ's resurrection points to that primordial joy that the new mother experiences – and the family with her – as the child is born “given to light”. The delight of a newborn, the elation of new life, the bliss of healing, the joy and the light of the resurrection – these all point to the call of living each day the abundant life of Jesus Christ. This is the Good News of the Easter experience. Confident in the saving and life-giving actions of Jesus, it is precisely because of Easter, that together we move forward to boldly proclaim in word and deed that Christ is Risen. In Him we have light and joy, life and love in abundance. Alleluia!

Happy and Blessed Easter to you and to your families and loved ones.



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