

# Christ is Risen! Allelulia

Archbishop John C. Wester, People of God, April 2016

Christ is risen! Allelulia! To all in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, I wish the fullness of Christ's Easter peace, praying that our risen Lord will deepen within each of us the profound and abiding joy that belongs to those who, through baptism, have died with Christ and are one with Him in His resurrection. In a particular way, I welcome with great joy our elect and candidates into full communion with us as we celebrate Christ's victory over sin and death. After forty days of fasting, almsgiving and prayer we enter fifty days of rejoicing and celebration, thanking God our Father for drawing us to Himself through His Son, Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit. Without a doubt, we are truly God's people and "Allelulia" is our song!

One of the striking features of Christ's resurrection appearances is that His wounds are clearly visible. In fact, the risen Christ invites His followers to "Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me and see because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see I have." (Luke 24:39) In a way, it seems strange that Christ's glorified body would bear the marks of His cruel passion and death. We would like to think that all that pain and suffering was a thing of the past and pretend that it never happened. But the Paschal mystery, i.e., the suffering death and resurrection of Christ, cannot be compartmentalized. It is one mystery, one life-giving event that contains within it the unspeakable pain of Christ's passion and at the same time, the seeds of new life. This is the great, central mystery of our faith. That Jesus Christ, our Savior, is constantly turning night into day, darkness into light, sin into grace and death into life. Every aspect of our lives, all that we are, is caught up in Christ's boundless love and bears the promise of new beginnings at every turn. Ours is not a faith that says, "don't worry nothing bad will ever happen to you." Rather, our faith says, "don't worry, bad things may happen to you but they are nothing to worry about."

It is only through faith that we can see the empty tomb as a sign that Christ is risen from the dead. It is only through faith that we can hold fast to hope even in the midst of our pain and suffering. Faith teaches us that Christ is always with us, particularly in our darkest moments. In Mark's narrative of the passion, it is the centurion who finally proclaims what we had been straining to hear throughout the first fourteen chapters of Mark's Gospel: "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (Mark 15: 39) He came to believe in the midst of the darkness: "at noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon." (Mark 15: 33) Paradoxically, it is in the darkness that God dwells (see 1 Kings 8: 12 and 2 Chronicles 6:1). The same is true for us. In our darkest moments, Christ is with us, leading us to new life. Only with the eyes of faith can we see a way out from our suffering. Only then can we believe that the risen Christ will save us once again. We may not understand it at the time, but we believe that Christ will not abandon us.

This year, one very palpable sign of Christ's presence is our Year of Mercy celebration. At the Holy Father's prompting, the entire Catholic Church is observing a year dedicated to being "merciful as the Father is merciful." In a world that seems at times completely devoid of mercy, the pope's initiative

could not be more welcome. All of us are called to reflect on the countless mercies that God shows us day in and day out, forgiving us our sins and calling us back to life through his forgiveness, particularly in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, or Confession. Our gratitude to God finds its fullest expression as we extend to one another the same mercy God shows us. This Easter season is a good time to single someone out whom we have been loath to forgive and tell them that we are willing to “bury the hatchet.” That person may have hurt us in some way and they may not be the most likeable, but true mercy doesn’t try to balance the scales. Rather, it seeks to find new life and new freedom by letting go of past hurts and allowing the power of forgiveness to find a new path and who knows, maybe a new friend. I still remember the striking picture of St. Pope John Paul II forgiving his would be assassin, Mehmet Ali Ağca, in the latter’s jail cell. The pope surely had every reason to be angry with the person who tried to kill him and yet, without being prompted, he offered his forgiveness and a hand of friendship. It is this kind of radical forgiveness that can change the world, one relationship at a time.

I am praying that all of us in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe will follow our Holy Father’s example and do our part to bring hope and forgiveness to the world. We are all called to give witness to Christ’s resurrection and to remind people that the risen Christ continues to breathe life into His church through the working of the Holy Spirit. In other words, death does not have the final word. We believe that our daily trials and difficulties are subsumed into the greater drama of divine Providence which is always leading to the empty tomb and new life. During these holy days of Easter, may we all be a source of life and forgiveness for each other, wounds and all, as we continue to follow Christ, recognizing Him in the breaking of the bread. It is worth repeating: death never has the last word – Jesus Christ does! Indeed, He is the Word uttered by God the father, in the Holy Spirit, calling us out of darkness and into His own, wonderful light.