

The text of Pope Benedict's Easter message.



Jesus Christ is “present as a force of hope through his Church,” Pope Benedict XVI announced in his Easter greeting addressed to the city of Rome and the world on April 8.

In his noon message, the Pope said the risen Lord inspires his Church to remain “close to all human situations of suffering and injustice,” including the persecution of Christians themselves.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Rome and throughout the world!

"Surrexit Christus, spes mea" – "Christ, my hope, has risen" (Easter Sequence).

May the jubilant voice of the Church reach all of you with the words which the ancient hymn puts on the lips of Mary Magdalene, the first to encounter the risen Jesus on Easter morning. She ran to the other disciples and breathlessly announced: "I have seen the Lord!" (Jn 20:18). We too, who have journeyed through the desert of Lent and the sorrowful days of the Passion, today raise the cry of victory: "He has risen! He has truly risen!"

Every Christian relives the experience of Mary Magdalene. It involves an encounter which changes our lives: the encounter with a unique Man who lets us experience all God's goodness and truth, who frees us from evil not in a superficial and fleeting way, but sets us free radically, heals us completely and restores our dignity. This is why Mary Magdalene calls Jesus "my hope": he was the one who allowed her to be reborn, who gave her a new future, a life of goodness and freedom from evil. "Christ my hope" means that all my yearnings for goodness find in him a real possibility of fulfilment: with him I can hope for a life that is good, full and eternal, for God himself has drawn near to us, even sharing our humanity.

But Mary Magdalene, like the other disciples, was to see Jesus rejected by the leaders of the people, arrested, scourged, condemned to death and crucified. It must have been unbearable to see Goodness in person subjected to human malice, truth derided by falsehood, mercy abused by vengeance. With

Jesus' death, the hope of all those who had put their trust in him seemed doomed. But that faith never completely failed: especially in the heart of the Virgin Mary, Jesus' Mother, its flame burned even in the dark of night. In this world, hope can not avoid confronting the harshness of evil. It is not thwarted by the wall of death alone, but even more by the barbs of envy and pride, falsehood and violence. Jesus passed through this mortal mesh in order to open a path to the kingdom of life. For a moment Jesus seemed vanquished: darkness had invaded the land, the silence of God was complete, hope a seemingly empty word.

And lo, on the dawn of the day after the Sabbath, the tomb is found empty. Jesus then shows himself to Mary Magdalene, to the other women, to his disciples. Faith is born anew, more alive and strong than ever, now invincible since it is based on a decisive experience: "Death with life contended: combat strangely ended! Life's own champion, slain, now lives to reign". The signs of the resurrection testify to the victory of life over death, love over hatred, mercy over vengeance: "The tomb the living did enclose, I saw Christ's glory as he rose! The angels there attesting, shroud with grave-clothes resting".

Dear brothers and sisters! If Jesus is risen, then – and only then – has something truly new happened, something that changes the state of humanity and the world. Then he, Jesus, is someone in whom we can put absolute trust; we can put our trust not only in his message but in Jesus himself, for the Risen One does not belong to the past, but is present today, alive. Christ is hope and comfort in a particular way for those Christian communities suffering most for their faith on account of discrimination and persecution. And he is present as a force of hope through his Church, which is close to all human situations of suffering and injustice.

May the risen Christ grant hope to the Middle East and enable all the ethnic, cultural and religious groups in that region to work together to advance the common good and respect for human rights. Particularly in Syria, may there be an end to bloodshed and an immediate commitment to the path of respect, dialogue and reconciliation, as called for by the international community. May the many refugees from that country who are in need of humanitarian assistance find the acceptance and solidarity capable of relieving their dreadful sufferings. May the paschal victory encourage the Iraqi people to spare no effort in pursuing the path of stability and development. In the Holy Land, may Israelis and Palestinians courageously take up anew the peace process.

May the Lord, the victor over evil and death, sustain the Christian communities of the African continent; may he grant them hope in facing their difficulties, and make them peacemakers and agents of development in the societies to which they belong.

May the risen Jesus comfort the suffering populations of the Horn of Africa and favour their reconciliation; may he help the Great Lakes Region, Sudan and South Sudan, and grant their inhabitants the power of forgiveness. In Mali, now experiencing delicate political developments, may the glorious Christ grant peace and stability. To Nigeria, which in recent times has experienced savage terrorist attacks, may the joy of Easter grant the strength needed to take up anew the building of a society which is peaceful and respectful of the religious freedom of all its citizens.

Happy Easter to all!

Pope Benedict XVI on Easter Sunday