

ENCOURAGEMENT ENCOURAGEMENT

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Living and dying... Dying to live

*'To everything there is a season
and a time to every purpose under heaven:
A time to be born and a time to die
A time to plant,
And a time to pluck up that which is planted
A time to weep and a time to laugh
A time to mourn and a time to dance'* Eccl 3:1, 2, 4

As we move through Lent some of our intention and thoughts may turn to its ending and the thoughts of Easter. We may be a little weary of some of the resolutions we may have made and failed to keep or that are still a challenge to us. Like players on a football field, halftime is a time to pick ourselves up dust ourselves down and start all over again. The second half may still give a hope of victory or indeed a continuation of partial success. This is not a time to rest on our laurels but keep on trying.

The feasts of the Church reflecting the life of Jesus are often like this. In Lent there is Rejoicing Sunday, a little lightness, Mothering Sunday, (not to mention the feast of St Patrick) followed by Holy Week and the anguish of Passion, and dying and then the Glory of the Resurrection. This is followed by the octave of Easter with the magnificent feast of The Divine Mercy of God who leads us step by step into a realisation of His tenderness, love, compassion and revealing a lasting Hope of Victory.

This balance in and aspect of our lives is reflected in our everyday living. There are times of great sadness and sorrow and then suddenly things improve and change and the path is smoother again. Holiness requires us be able to carry both situations and integrate them. Very, very, few people go through life all on one plain or the other. Some people do seem to have more than their fair

share of suffering and others joy but it is the way that this is carried that tells us about the calibre of the person. How clearly we see this pattern in the church's year and so very especially at this time. Do we not see this too in Jesus' life too, wedding and funerals, crowds and solitude, rejection and praise, suffering and healing...?

Isn't this month of April just like that? We start April on 'all fool's' day and in the depths of Lent. Before too long we enter into Holy Week with the contradiction of Palm Sunday and the Passion of Jesus' betrayal, injustice and suffering. But also the new treatment of His love in the leaving us with His Body and Blood so that we can survive and transcend both his death on the Cross *but also our own*, and then the mystery, the sheer unbridled Joy of His Resurrection: the coming back to life.

How amazing this must have been for the Apostles who thought that they had lost him for ever. All was lost and futile; all was a waste of time. Nice dreams, but a kind of betrayal of their trust. Then suddenly He appears, death has not held Him. And slowly they

realise it will not bind *them*. So we rejoice and *sing alleluia*. Then in case we forget, very soon within the octave (eight days) we enter another feast to remind us that we have been celebrating not only the Resurrection but the essential quality behind His actions and that this is the Mercy of God who is faithful to all His promises and is with us till the end of time.

All is a mystery of a plan that we cannot fathom or understand. However hard we try. Each person has his own journey to undertake and each person has their own struggles and victories. Most of us fear death; most people find it hard to envisage a life after death and especially today in the doubting and cynical world that does not easily accept the



Jesus, I thank you that you died,
Your spilled blood was for me
Death could not hold you in the grave,
But you rose victoriously.
M. S. Lowndes

"Tell My daughter, that I am Love and Mercy itself. When a soul approaches me with Trust, I fill it with such an abundance of graces that it cannot contain them within itself, but radiates them to other souls."
St Faustyna's Diary

inexplicable by Faith alone. Heaven seems like a remote and distant land that we are not even sure exists even if it is comforting to believe in it. Yet the whole life of Jesus is precisely about the continuation of life and the fact that in spite of struggles and battles, pain, fear, and desolation, in spite of many good things that *life never ends*. It is important to grasp this reality that we are made for Life and that this was achieved through one Man: **Jesus**: and achieved through death which he conquered.



There is a wise saying that goes like this...
'if you die before you die then when you die you will not die.'

This may seem like nonsense but it touches on the core of the continuation of life and the essence of the teaching of Jesus.

Every event in our life requires of us a certain surrender, a kind of stepping back from the reality of what has happened or is about to happen to us. Whether it is time for rejoicing, say a family birth or wedding, or a funeral with loss and grief: in each situation there is a mixture of feelings both sad and happy. As we step back we realise that all are part of the events of our life that shape us to accept what we have little control over, but each recreates us into a new person and new start. These little deaths are a foretaste of the life that is promised that will lead us to an eternity where death has no more hold on us, practice runs if you like. Acceptance of these events with trust and hope shape us as ever the more truly to prepare for our final new beginning.

During Lent these events are heightened as we are asked to make sacrifices for others, be generous and kind, and think of others - not only of ourselves, and be disciplined (disciples) They are a dying to self which also is a preparation for those final moments that Jesus experienced on the Cross and which he too felt so bitterly.

Finally we as Christian people should be dying to live. Not only in terms of dying to self so that we can have an eternity of Joy, but also we should

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embrace life whatever the season, whatever life throws at us whatever the circumstances.

Life is a precious gift. If it were not so would we be granted it for all eternity by a God that is all Mercy and Love?

Saints, holy people, love life, smile and go on because they grasp this significance. H.H.

May Easter bring you abundant Joy and fill you with the blessing of Life.

Jesus said: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he may die, he shall live"
- John 11: 25

Pope Francis 1

'Let the Risen Jesus enter your life, welcome him as a friend, **with trust**: he is life! If up till now you have kept him at a distance, step forward. He will receive you with open arms. If you have been indifferent, take a risk: you won't be disappointed. If following him seems difficult, don't be afraid, trust him, be confident that he is close to you, he is with you and he will give you the peace you are looking for and the strength to live as he would have you do.'
Easter Vigil Mass (2013)

Papal Prayer Intentions.

That governments may foster the protection of creation and the just distribution of natural resources.

That the Risen Lord may fill with hope the hearts of those who are being tested by pain and sickness.



'She is not dead but sleeping!'

Jesus I trust in You

Feasts

Palm Sunday 13th April. Holy Week,
Holy Thursday 17th, Good Friday 18th
Holy Saturday and the Vigil of Easter,
Easter Sunday 20th. Feast of Divine Mercy 27th
St Catherine of Sienna 29th.