

[Acts 10:34-43](#); [Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24](#); [1 Corinthians 15:1-11](#); [Mark 16:1-8](#)

### A Mystery Beyond Words

Some years I ago joined a group with South American Mission Society in Paraguay and I was tremendously moved by the experience. On our return trip we called by the Iguacu Falls to add a totally different dimension to already supercharged emotions. We all brought home hundreds of photographs, and video footage to share but we soon realised the futility of such photos when it comes to sharing experiences with those who were not there! Others had to see for themselves what we saw, before there was any hope of real understanding or appreciation taking place. For those who don't understand, no words are possible, and for those who do understand, no words are necessary. Do you get the same sense as you read the resurrection story? Here is the account of something deeply mysterious, but we can't quite capture the impact within the hearts of Jesus' followers, that first Easter day. Some accounts have Mary rushing off to tell the disciples, and today's account has her stunned to fearful silence. Other accounts have Peter and the other disciple running all over the place in excitement. There are angels and strange visions in this story.

This is the Gospel! This is truly *great* news! This story is timeless and so very real for *here and now*. Each of us can see ourselves reflected in the characters of the story. How are we reacting here and now to this story as the Magdelenes or Peters of today?

Ask these questions.... When did you first hear about the resurrection of Jesus? When did you personally *experience* it for yourself?

Is it possible that the experience came in moments of darkness and desolation, when you cried to God for help? We all have our moments when we cry out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" But God does not forget or forsake us, and the darkest hour is just before the dawn.

Saint John of the Cross' 16<sup>th</sup> century poem narrates the journey of the soul from its bodily home to its union with God. The journey is called "The Dark Night", because darkness represents the hardships and difficulties the soul meets in detachment from the world and reaching the light of the union with the Creator. The main idea of the poem can be seen as the painful experience that people endure as they seek to grow in spiritual maturity and union with God. The journey involves a purification of the senses and, more intensely, the purification of the spirit. These are intense experiences described by countless souls down through the years and in the here and now.

The disciples had come through a period of despair, confusion and fear, and now on this Easter morning, when the stone was rolled away from the mouth of the tomb it seemed for a moment that the darkness could not get any blacker. But then – the daylight! Are our hearts like tombs awaiting resurrection? Can we identify anything akin to a stone holding us back from enjoying the fullness of life? It could be an addiction, a compulsion or some hidden and dark secret that has never been shared with anyone. We can be as sick as our secrets. But our lives can be transformed by this same resurrection of Jesus, and we can experience overwhelming joy to share with others – even if they can't quite grasp it – yet!

However, there is the distinct possibility that we are **not** shocked by this unimaginably joyous, unprecedented event. Easter can become just another one of those stories with a feel-good, happy ending. If we are not careful, we will cease to be excited when we hear the almost unbelievable Good

News of the empty tomb. Familiarity can breed, if not contempt, then at least a lackadaisical attitude; and Jesus' resurrection is not for us a life-changing gift, but rather a short pause in a colourful family celebration lined only with bunnies and baskets.

It is important that we understand Easter profoundly and appreciate its ultimate value; important that we remember that it follows and gives meaning to the weight of Good Friday and the pain that black day bears. The sadness and darkness of Good Friday discloses several things that should never be glossed over.

Easter means that no power on earth can destroy the reality that is Christ.

Towards the end of Tolkien's Lord of the Rings, when Frodo, the hobbit-bearer of the Ring of Power has fulfilled his task, and the Kingdom of Mordor, of evil and death, has imploded, both Frodo and his faithful companion Sam now expect to die, and collapse exhausted as Mount Doom dissolves around them. Then, sometime later Sam wakes up. To his astonishment "he found that he was lying on some soft bed", and "over him gently swayed wide beechen boughs, and through their young leaves sunlight glimmered, green and gold. All the air was full of a sweet scent." He sees Frodo asleep in the bed beside him, and then he hears a voice behind him, the voice of his beloved Master Gandalf. "Well, Master Samwise, how do you feel?"

"But Sam lay back, and stared with open mouth, and for a moment, between bewilderment and great joy, he could not answer. At last he gasped: 'Gandalf! I thought you were dead! But then I thought I was dead myself.'" And then Sam asks, musing aloud: "**Is everything sad going to come untrue?** What's happened to the world?" This is fiction, fantasy, of course, though from a Christian pen and informed by a Christian vision. But take that question: **Is everything sad going to come untrue?** It's the question a child might ask. It isn't a fictional question.

### **Is everything sad going to come untrue?**

This is the meaning of Easter!

The power of sin and death, has already been broken. The end of all things has already come. Something has happened to the world. Through Christ, who in obedience and love suffered the sadness and darkness of Good Friday, everything sad has come untrue for us. In the words of St John Chrysostom's Easter Homily read every Easter throughout Eastern Christianity .....

### **EASTER HOMILY**

*by St. John Chrysostom*

*Let all pious men and all lovers of God rejoice in the splendour of this feast; let the wise servants blissfully enter into the joy of their Lord; let those who have borne the burden of Lent now receive their pay, and those who have toiled since the first hour, let them now receive their due reward; let any who came after the third hour be grateful to join in the feast, and those who may have come after the sixth, let them not be afraid of being too late; for the Lord is gracious and He receives the last even as the first. He gives rest to him who comes on the eleventh hour as well as to him who has toiled since the first: yes, He has pity on the last and He serves the first; He rewards the one and praises the effort.*

*Come you all: enter into the joy of your Lord. You the first and you the last, receive alike your reward; you rich and you poor, dance together; you sober and you weaklings, celebrate the day; you who have kept the fast and you who have not,*

*rejoice today. The table is richly loaded: enjoy its royal banquet. The calf is a fatted one: let no one go away hungry. All of you enjoy the banquet of faith; all of you receive the riches of his goodness. Let no one grieve over his poverty, for the universal kingdom has been revealed; let no one weep over his sins, for pardon has shone from the grave; let no one fear death, for the death of our Saviour has set us free: He has destroyed it by enduring it, He has despoiled Hades by going down into its kingdom, He has angered it by allowing it to taste of his flesh.*

*When Isaias foresaw all this, he cried out: "O Hades, you have been angered by encountering Him in the nether world." Hades is angered because frustrated, it is angered because it has been mocked, it is angered because it has been destroyed, it is angered because it has been reduced to naught, it is angered because it is now captive. It seized a body, and, lo! it encountered heaven; it seized the visible, and was overcome by the invisible.*

*O death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory? Christ is risen and you are abolished. Christ is risen and the demons are cast down. Christ is risen and the angels rejoice. Christ is risen and life is freed. Christ is risen and the tomb is emptied of the dead: for Christ, being risen from the dead, has become the Leader and Reviver of those who had fallen asleep. To Him be glory and power for ever and ever. Amen.*

One day the Risen Christ will transfigure **our** mortal bodies, but his already risen life can live in us now as forgiveness, as faith, hope and love, as prayer and peace, making us children of God, sons and daughters in the Son, brothers and sisters of one another.

Christ is risen. He is truly risen! And so we can say even now: everything sad will come untrue. We have a sure and certain hope.

“‘A great Shadow has departed,’ said Gandalf, and then he laughed, and the sound was like music, or like water in a parched land; and as he listened the thought came to Sam that he had not heard laughter, the pure sound of merriment, for days upon days without count. It fell upon his ears like the echo of all the joys he had ever known. But he himself burst into tears. Then, as a sweet rain will pass down a wind of spring and the sun will shine out the clearer, his tears ceased, and his laughter welled up, and laughing he sprang from his bed”.

Christ is risen! He is truly risen! Alleluia.