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Pope's Easter message focuses on hope and peace

by NCR Staff



The following is the text of Pope Benedict's Easter message:

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I bring you the Easter proclamation in these words of the Liturgy, which echo the ancient hymn of praise sung by the Israelites after crossing the Red Sea.

It is recounted in the Book of Exodus (cf 15:19-21) that when they had crossed the sea on dry land, and saw the Egyptians submerged by the waters, Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, and the other women sang and danced to this song of joy: "Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed wonderfully: horse and rider he has thrown into the sea!" Christians throughout the world repeat this canticle at the Easter Vigil, and a special prayer explains its meaning; a prayer that now, in the full light of the resurrection, we joyfully make our own: "Father, even today we see the wonders of the miracles you worked long ago. You once saved a single nation from slavery, and now you offer that salvation to all through baptism. May the peoples of the world become true sons of Abraham and prove worthy of the heritage of Israel."

The Gospel has revealed to us the fulfilment of the ancient figures: in his death and resurrection, Jesus Christ has freed us from the radical slavery of sin and opened for us the way towards the promised land,

the Kingdom of God, the universal Kingdom of justice, love and peace. This "exodus" takes place first of all within man himself, and it consists in a new birth in the Holy Spirit, the effect of the baptism that Christ has given us in his Paschal Mystery. The old man yields his place to the new man; the old life is left behind, and a new life can begin (cf. Rom 6:4). But this spiritual "exodus" is the beginning of an integral liberation, capable of renewing us in every dimension ? human, personal and social.

Yes, my brothers and sisters, Easter is the true salvation of humanity! If Christ ? the Lamb of God ? had not poured out his blood for us, we would be without hope, our destiny and the destiny of the whole world would inevitably be death. But Easter has reversed that trend: Christ?s resurrection is a new creation, like a graft that can regenerate the whole plant. It is an event that has profoundly changed the course of history, tipping the scales once and for all on the side of good, of life, of pardon. We are free, we are saved! Hence from deep within our hearts we cry out: "Let us sing to the Lord: glorious his triumph!"

The Christian people, having emerged from the waters of baptism, is sent out to the whole world to bear witness to this salvation, to bring to all people the fruit of Easter, which consists in a new life, freed from sin and restored to its original beauty, to its goodness and truth. Continually, in the course of two thousand years, Christians ? especially saints ? have made history fruitful with their lived experience of Easter. The Church is the people of the Exodus, because she constantly lives the Paschal Mystery and disseminates its renewing power in every time and place. In our days too, humanity needs an "exodus", not just superficial adjustment, but a spiritual and moral conversion. It needs the salvation of the Gospel, so as to emerge from a profound crisis, one which requires deep change, beginning with consciences.

I pray to the Lord Jesus that in the Middle East, and especially in the land sanctified by his death and resurrection, the peoples will accomplish a true and definitive "exodus" from war and violence to peace and concord. To the Christian communities who are experiencing trials and sufferings, especially in Iraq, the Risen Lord repeats those consoling and encouraging words that he addressed to the Apostles in the Upper Room: "Peace be with you!" (Jn 20:21).

For the countries in Latin America and the Caribbean that are seeing a dangerous resurgence of crimes linked to drug trafficking, let Easter signal the victory of peaceful coexistence and respect for the common good. May the beloved people of Haiti, devastated by the appalling tragedy of the earthquake, accomplish their own "exodus" from mourning and from despair to a new hope, supported by international solidarity. May the beloved citizens of Chile, who have had to endure another grave catastrophe, set about the task of reconstruction with tenacity, supported by their faith.

In the strength of the risen Jesus, may the conflicts in Africa come to an end, conflicts which continue to cause destruction and suffering, and may peace and reconciliation be attained, as guarantees of development. In particular I entrust to the Lord the future of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea and Nigeria.

May the Risen Lord sustain the Christians who suffer persecution and even death for their faith, as for example in Pakistan. To the countries afflicted by terrorism and by social and religious discrimination, may He grant the strength to undertake the work of building dialogue and serene coexistence. To the leaders of nations, may Easter bring light and strength, so that economic and financial activity may finally be driven by the criteria of truth, justice and fraternal aid. May the saving power of Christ?s resurrection fill all of humanity, so that it may overcome the multiple tragic expressions of a "culture of death" which are becoming increasingly widespread, so as to build a future of love and truth in which every human life is respected and welcomed.

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Dear brothers and sisters, Easter does not work magic. Just as the Israelites found the desert awaiting them on the far side of the Red Sea, so the Church, after the resurrection, always finds history filled with joy and hope, grief and anguish. And yet, this history is changed, it is marked by a new and eternal covenant, it is truly open to the future. For this reason, saved by hope, let us continue our pilgrimage, bearing in our hearts the song that is ancient and yet ever new: "Let us sing to the Lord: glorious his triumph!"

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