

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

There is an energy and joy in the celebration of Easter, as we join in the acclamation 'Alleluia! Christ is Risen!' with the response 'He is risen indeed! Alleluia!'. It is a dramatic change of tone after the solemn journey with Jesus through Holy Week. But what about this year? How can we express this joy in the face of the pandemic? Should we feel joyful when there is so much anguish and suffering around? Can we know joy when we are ill or mourning the loss of someone we love?

The pandemic does not change the spiritual truths that the 'the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it' (John 1:5) and that Jesus' cross and resurrection overcomes the power of darkness and death.

Our response of joy is not pretending that everything is all right. The light shines in the darkness. Joy is not the same as happiness, but a gift of God that comes when we accept his love for us. At Easter we see God's love for us through the death and resurrection of Jesus, making it possible for us to be children of God.

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Christ is risen. In Matthew's gospel the cosmic nature of this is shown by an earthquake as the whole of creation is affected. What is your reaction to the empty tomb? The gospel reading from John (20:1-18) shows us three people, their different ways of reacting and what they needed in order to believe. I wonder what you need in order to believe and if you identify with one of them?

The 'other disciple' went into the tomb and believed. He saw the grave clothes rolled up and left behind (a contrast with Lazarus, who came out of the tomb still wearing graveclothes and, unlike Lazarus, Jesus would not need them again, John 11:44). This is the same disciple who is described as 'the disciple Jesus loved' and his love for Jesus was enough for him to believe Jesus had risen.

Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb 'while it is still dark', the darkness of her not-yet-belief. Her first reaction was that the body of Jesus had been stolen and, having told the disciples, she returns to the tomb to weep. Two angels ask her why she is weeping. So does Jesus, but it is only when he says her name that she believes.

Peter runs to the tomb with the other disciple but does not believe. He will need to understand the resurrection through the Scriptures. His encounters with the risen Christ are yet to come.

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When Mary realises it is Jesus, she reaches out to touch him, but he says 'don't hold on to me because I have not yet ascended to the Father', and when he adds 'and your Father' he is revealing that her faith has made her a child of God.

Do you know the security of being a child of God?

Jesus says he will ascend to his Father and our Father, to his God and our God, and as a child of God this too is our home, one where there are many dwelling places prepared for us (John 14:2).

Christ is risen! And we say 'Alleluia' because his death and resurrection mean that if we believe, then we are children of God, with a secure identity and hope for eternity that allows us to know joy, even in this present crisis.