The Easter Message of Hope

Someone once wrote: **Totally without hope one cannot live. To live without hope is to cease to live.** And I believe there is a great deal of truth in those words.

In the difficult and often confusing world in which we live today, hope, for many people, is something that seems to be short supply. In fact, I would even go so far as to say that in a world of pain, grief and sorrow, of complex family relationships, of problems at work - alongside many other hardships of life causing sadness, loneliness and depression - hope, for many people, has died a death!

*But hope, I believe, is one of the key Christian attributes and one of the most important gifts we can give to the world today.*

Nothing brings hope back to life like Easter. For the Easter message gives us hope in a bewildering world and hope to face the uncertainties of the future. This special day never arrives without its refreshing reminder that there is life beyond this one: **True life. Eternal life. Glorious life.** Those who live on the 'outside' of hope need an injection of hope (a hope transfusion perhaps!) and Easter certainly gives it.

The Easter message is well known - there is no need to prolong it, complicate it or try to explain or defend it. The facts speak for themselves:

- Jesus said He would be *in the heart of the earth* for three days and nights (Matthew 12:40)
- Later, He said He would *suffer ... be killed, and be raised up on the third day* (Matthew 16:21)
- Betrayed by Judas, He was placed under arrest, hurriedly pushed through several trials and declared guilty - first of *blasphemy* and then of *treason* (Luke 22:70; 23:24)

- *Finally, all the disciples left Him and fled* (Matthew 26:56)
- Alone and forsaken, He endured the torture of scourging, the humiliation of insults and mockery and the agony of that walk to Golgotha (Mark 15:15-22)
- The horrors of crucifixion followed, leaving Him suspended for six excruciating hours - the last three of which were spent in eerie darkness that *fell over the whole land* (Mark 15:33).
- Then - He died. (Matthew 27:50; Mark 15:37; Luke 23:46; John 19:30)
- Two men, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, took Him down from the cross, prepared the body for burial and placed it *in the garden in a new tomb.* (John 19:38-41)
- Because He had predicted, *After three days I am to rise again,* the chief priests and the Pharisees had the tomb secured by a large stone, set a seal on the stone, and arranged for a Roman guard to watch over the tomb. (Matthew 27:62-66)
- Before dawn on the third day, a miracle occurred. When astonished people visited the tomb that morning, they found the stone rolled away and the body gone. They were asked by angels, *Why do you seek the living One among the dead? He is not here, but He has risen just as He said.* (Luke 24:5-6; Matthew 28:6)

I cannot fully explain all that happened on that first Easter day in this short column, but the simple fact is that *there is something magnificent, therapeutic and reassuring about Easter morning - Hope.* And this hope in the resurrected Christ silences the empty message of sceptics and cynics alike. How? Because the evidence of the resurrected Christ can be found in the testimony of many thousands of people who have had their lives transformed by the indwelling presence of Jesus through a personal trust and faith in Him.

Our identity, at this time of Easter celebration, is strengthened as we stand together and proclaim: **Alleluia! Christ is risen - He is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

This hope can be with us every moment of our life. The prayer of St. Patrick (whom we remembered on March 17th) puts it into a much better perspective than I ever could:

*Christ be with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,*
*Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,*
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ where I lie, Christ where I sit, Christ where I arise,
Christ in the heart of every one who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of every one who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.

Salvation is of the Lord,
Salvation is of the Lord,
Salvation is of the Christ,

May your salvation, O Lord, be ever with us. Amen.

A HOPE transfusion awaits us, it happens every Easter Sunday - make sure you don't miss it this year. It’s guaranteed to change your life!

With every blessing in Jesus’ precious name

Paul