

Your grief will turn into joy

Monthly Reflection:

April 2023

The Crucifix must be the most loved and adored image of our Lord; and Lent, the season when we meditate most on the message of the crucifix. Often our meditation is confined to the passion and death of Jesus, arousing sorrow for our sins which caused it. But the message of the crucifix is way beyond that. For it is on the cross that God showed His love for the world by giving his only Son, "so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (Jn. 3:16). St Mother Teresa of Calcutta rightly remarked, "When I look at the crucifix, I realize how much my God loves me."

What's more, the best was yet to come - the Resurrection! During the Lenten season, the Church invites us to prepare also for the joy of the Resurrection. Yes, we are an Easter people; a people who live in the hope of the resurrection. Lent is not just a time of remembrance of His death, but of Him who has defeated death and risen again to life and our own resurrection from death. (cf. 1 Thes. 4:14).

The resurrection of Jesus is the victory of good over evil, of joy over grief. Easter assures us that while we have sorrowful Good Friday experiences in life, they will definitely be overshadowed by the joy of Easter Sunday. Very often, we brood on our painful experiences even when they are long past and miss enjoying the present life. This makes us vulnerable to the lie that the Christian life is all about suffering, while those in the world are enjoying themselves. Remember these words of Jesus: "Very truly, I tell you, you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice; you will have pain, but your grief will turn into joy" (Jn. 16:20).

Jesus prepares his disciples for his death and they struggle to make sense of what he tries to convey. Yes, they will weep and mourn when their Lord is taken away from them, condemned and mercilessly put to death. But in a little while, he will conquer death and rise again. And then, their grief will turn to joy (cf. Jn. 16:20). The joy of Mary Magdalene on seeing the Risen Lord transforms her into an apostle for the apostles. The joy of the disciples on encountering the Risen Lord is sealed and strengthened at Pentecost. As Jesus had promised, "No one could take their joy away from them" (cf. Jn. 16:22) - this joy in the Holy Spirit. Neither suffering nor death could quench their indomitable joy. We catch a glimpse of this joy lingering even a century later in the letter that the Athenian philosopher, a disciple of Jesus, Aristides writes to the Roman Emperor Hadrian (AD 117-138). "Every morning and all hours on account of the goodness of God toward them, they render praise and laud Him over their food and their drink; they render Him thanks. And if any righteous person of their number passes away from this world, they rejoice and give thanks to God and they follow his body as though he were moving from one place to another. And when a child is born to them, they praise God, and if again it chances to die in its infancy, they praise God mightily, as for one who has passed through the world without sins."

Like the apostles and early disciples, through His death and resurrection, we too have been brought into a kingdom of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17). It is not a joy devoid of sickness, failure or misunderstanding, but a joy in the midst of it all. It is a joy that springs from God. And as Christians, in the face of grief, we need to pick up our aching hearts and walk in faith, as we let him turn our grief into joy.

Let us long for Easter morn as Mary of Magdalene did. Let us search our hearts and cleanse ourselves from everything that dulls our eyes from seeing and ears from hearing Him. The encounter with the Risen Lord will not only fill our souls with divine joy but also make us radiant witnesses of His resurrection. Grief cannot stand in His presence; it has to give way to joy!

Fr. Joseph Ezhumayil

Fr Joseph, chaplain of the Jesus Youth International Council, belongs to Kothamangalam Diocese in Kerala. Since last year, he is serving the Syro-Malabar Diocese of Melbourne in Australia. He is closely associated with the movement from his seminary days.