

Catholic Review Column: The Joy of the Gospel, Part 5 of 9

This is my last column before we celebrate Palm Sunday and the sacred liturgies of the Triduum. As we continue our journey together through Lent and through the Pope's apostolic exhortation, "Evangelii Gaudium" (The Joy of the Gospel), it is an opportune moment to reflect on the relationship of Christ's death and resurrection to our call to joyfully proclaim the good news.

For many, the liturgies of Holy Week and Easter conjure up conflicting feelings and emotions. From the readings to the music and even the lighting, there is a somber mood throughout the Triduum, as we suffer with Christ during the reading of the Passion, which gives way to joy and light marking Christ's victory over death at Easter.

Christ's resurrection is the most powerful moment in all of Scripture. It is powerful not just because it reveals to the world God's true power and his unquestionable love for us, but also the promise of life everlasting, and the path forward for all of God's people, including us.

"Christ's resurrection is not an event of the past; it contains a vital power which has permeated this world," Pope Francis tells us. "Where all seems to be dead, signs of the resurrection suddenly spring up. It is an irresistible force" (EG, no. 276).

The resurrection, Pope Francis tells us, just like the light that shines forth in our churches at Easter, is the light that guides us during those dark periods when we feel alone and afraid, and even abandoned by God.

"Often it seems that God does not exist: all around us we see persistent injustice, evil, indifference and cruelty. But it is also true that in the midst of darkness something new always springs to life and sooner or later produces fruit. However dark things are, goodness always re-emerges and spreads ... such is the power of the resurrection, and all who evangelize are instruments of that power" (EG, n. 276).

Such goodness can be seen at the Easter Vigil, when the church welcomes into the

fullness of the faith the newly baptized and confirmed. For it is during this Mass – recognized as the highlight of the liturgical year – that Christ breaks the chains of death and the church welcomes new sons and daughters in whose lives the saving power of Christ’s death and resurrection becomes real through the sacraments.

The Easter message of Christ’s death and resurrection is at the heart of our call to evangelization. “Pope John Paul II (said) that if the Church ‘is to fulfill its providential destiny, evangelization as the joyful, patient and progressive preaching of the saving death and resurrection of Jesus Christ must be your absolute priority.’ These words hold true for all of us” (EG, no.110).

Whether you attend Mass regularly, come once a year or have been away from the church for some time, I personally invite you to come to Mass this Holy Week and Easter. And if you do attend Mass regularly, I encourage you to invite a neighbor, friend or family member to come to church this Holy Week and Easter to experience firsthand the life-giving, life-changing story of Christ’s death and resurrection.

“I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since ‘no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord.’ (Pope Paul VI in his apostolic exhortation, *Gaudete in Domino*, The Day of the Lord). The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms” (EG, no. 3).