

In considering Easter, we need to be clear about two things: first, that Easter isn't "once upon a time", and second, that Easter doesn't happen in a vacuum.

It's true that Jesus did die and rise at a particular time in history, but as Pope Francis has written:

Christ's resurrection is not an event of the past; it contains a vital power which has permeated this world. Where all seems to be dead, signs of the resurrection suddenly spring up. It is an irresistible force. 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. Each day in our world beauty is born anew; it rises transformed through the storms of history, and human beings have arisen time after time from situations that seemed doomed (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 276).

Easter speaks of a love which is stronger than death; and that love can never be just "once upon a time".

At Easter therefore we celebrate *who God is*: "God is love" (1 John 4:8); and we celebrate *what God does*: Jesus is "the firstborn from the dead" (Col 1:18).

To say that Jesus is the firstborn means that there are others who come after him. Mary is prime among those, which is why we speak of her assumption into heaven. Where Jesus and Mary have gone, we are called to follow. In other words, the Lord's death and resurrection are to become the pattern of our life as disciples.

In the Letter to the Philippians, St Paul speaks of his desire "to reproduce the pattern of the Lord's death" (3:10); and that's exactly what happened in his apostolic mission. Every attempt to silence or stop Paul in his mission only served to give it greater impetus. Even his martyrdom, when they tried to silence and stop him once and for all, only ensured that his voice would be heard till the end of time. In our own way, we too are called "to reproduce the pattern of the Lord's death", the death that leads to life; and insofar as we do that, Easter is not "once upon a time" but here and now.

Because Easter is here and now it is never in a vacuum. This year we celebrate Easter in very particular circumstances. First we had the pandemic, and that seemed bad enough. Lives were lost, the social fabric frayed and the economy was hit hard. We saw the powers of death at work in ways we'd never seen before. Then we had the floods. Again lives were lost, homes were destroyed and property devastated. Here the powers of death struck in a way we'd seen before in this part of the world, only a few years back. On top of all that we now have the genocidal war in Ukraine, with world peace looking more fragile than it's looked for a long time. The powers of death which so ravaged Europe in the last century have returned in a horrific way.

All of this is the context of this year's Easter celebration. As we gather to light the Easter fire in the darkness, we proclaim that out of the pandemic, the floods and the war new life can come and will come, just as Jesus walked from the tomb into every time and place. That is the hope which nothing and no-one can destroy. That is the truth of Easter.