

## REFLECTIONS ON EASTER IN TIME OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In these most trying times of the COVID-19 pandemic with all of its devastating effects, the Vatican has, among many other resources at our disposal, recently published a 192-page online prayer recourse to help and assist Catholics around the world in the time of the present pandemic currently ravaging the globe.

The book which has been made available to Catholics around the world through the Vatican website and other Catholic media outlets has the title: *Strong in the Face of Tribulation: The Church in Communion - a Sure Support in Time of Trial*. It has the image of the Archangel Michael on its cover and is divided into three major parts including prayers and the practice of the faith without the Sacraments and Pope Francis' reflections all through the period of the current pandemic.

No doubt, this will be a great spiritual resource and assistance in these times of doing things in a totally different way in the knowledge that God never deserts His people no matter the situation or the challenges that we may experience in our life and faith journey.

Granted Easter Day has come and gone but the season of Easter is still with us as we continue to celebrate the Risen Lord and the power of life over death, light over darkness, goodness and righteousness over evil and wickedness as this year's Easter celebration, unlike other years, leave a lot of memories - for a very long time to come.

For me, this year's Easter and the Holy Week ceremonies will not only go down in history as the first time in my ministry when I had to celebrate all alone those most important days in our Christian calendar, but will be the first of its kind in my entire life and I would suppose in the lives of other Christians around the globe.

No doubt, the Easter celebrations and the Holy Week preceding it have always been a special time and period that I have personally always looked forward to with much joy and anticipation. But that this year's celebrations came with a huge difference, coming at a time of isolation and social distancing thereby making it difficult for people to gather and congregate and be with each other during those most special and solemn times in our Christian lives and calendar, took many people by surprise and unawares.

However, the great difference and most unusual manner of celebration did not in any way diminish or take away the power, joy and many blessings that have always come with Easter; the many blessings of the Risen Lord and the Easter season for which we have all been invited and called to go out into the world and profess: Jesus is alive and indeed risen as he said.

Although we may have celebrated this year's Resurrection Day in a totally different way, many may have also wondered what is going on, perhaps saddened and disappointed in one

way or another that we could not gather to worship and celebrate that the Lord is risen indeed, and like the two disciples in this Sunday's gospel reading from Luke 24: 13-35, not satisfied with the story of the resurrection, were on their way to Emmaus discussing as they walked along all that had happened until Jesus came along to reveal himself to them in the sharing of the words of Scripture and the breaking of the bread as the risen Lord.

They could not understand pain, suffering, and catastrophe as part of God's plan but Jesus showed them that it was. They had expected a liberator who would save and deliver Israel from their enemies but Jesus revealed himself as the crucified redeemer and saviour of all.

Just as the risen Lord revealed Himself to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, he can also reveal himself to us today not only in the temple and places of worship or pilgrimage centers but in our situations and difficulty, and in the ordinary situations and places of our everyday life.

Granted today virtually everything is done differently not only with regards to our practice of the faith but the day to day way of living, the way we work and engage, the way we travel and socialize, the way we recreate and play games, and it goes on and on and yet we are still able to connect with each other through various means and ways in such a time as this and could still stand in the gap for one another in prayer, remembering members of our faith community, our family members, our loved ones and friends, those on the frontlines in the fight against the ravaging COVID-19 pandemic, our medical professionals and health care workers, our military personnel, those in essential duties, those who are volunteering their time and efforts to reach out to the most in need the less privileged and the vulnerable amongst us.

Indeed, we can still show that the power of the Risen Lord can never go out even in the darkest of times and moments. Together we have continued to show the power that exists in our common humanity and that even amidst the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic we could still feel and experience the love and care of each other and the power of the Risen Lord.

This is not a time to give up our hope and trust in the Risen Lord but a time to show faith and strength knowing that the Lord continues to accompany us on the journey of life as he accompanied the two disciples on their journey with his loving and abiding presence. I pray and hope we continue to stay well and safe and always find some time to cheer up and share some bright and happy moments with friends and loved ones knowing that these trying times will eventually pass us by and will for sure make us and our world become even better and stronger together.

-Father Gordian Okpuruka