

It was three o'clock on an April afternoon two thousand years ago, when "darkness came over all the land", not only over Jerusalem. Jesus had died on the cross. Also in April 2022 darkness came over all the land, not only over Kiev, the Jerusalem of Russia. But at dawn on the first day after the Sabbath in that ancient April, some women who had gone to the tomb of Jesus to perform the last pious actions, saw that the tomb was empty. At first they feared that someone had stolen him. The reality was different: Jesus had risen; he had not just come back to life, like Lazarus a few days earlier, but he had "risen", that is, he had been transformed so radically, he had conquered death once and for all. A new world had begun, freed forever from the power of Evil.

The Gospel continues to tell this amazing story. Even this year. There is something to be said: we are all plunged into a thick darkness because of the injustice and wars that plague the world. Pope Francis has spoken of "a piecemeal world war" several times. We might even say that "the world is falling apart". And dangerously so: all the pieces are in fact connecting to each other more and more clearly. The war in Ukraine is live streamed everywhere: it goes straight from the battleground to the television screens. No one is spared, no matter if adult or child. We all see the world falling apart, as if it is being bombed. And we helplessly witness all this, resigned to the inevitability of what is happening. There are those who even say that it is necessary to let the conflict continue. As if war were the most common reality. Hence the arms race is back. All countries are participating actively in the race for rearmament. Even those countries you wouldn't have expected. And, of course, everything is more than justified. We are witnessing the exact opposite of what happened after World War II. Mind you, it is true that the Cold War was born then and with it the Berlin Wall and many other things that were certainly not commendable. But at least there was a longing for peace and agreements on disarmament. That was also a time full of dreams and visions. I myself, born at the beginning of those years, grew up and grew old in a Europe without war, or rather Europe during the Cold War.

Today the war hasn't just thawed, it's getting "hotter". What a sad awakening in these weeks! And we have to witness a slow habituation: the dramatic scenes of war are beginning not to impress us so much. We are not thinking enough about the fact that the effects of this war are devastating and they will last for many years to come. Those who cry out to stop the war are not only ignored, but they are also laughed at or otherwise dismissed. In any case, their cry goes unheeded, because this is how the majority decides.

But here is the scandalous proclamation of Easter. In the thick darkness that is enveloping and blinding us, here comes the proclamation of the "resurrection"

of Jesus. The angel sent by God to those women who had gone to the tomb of Jesus early in the morning said: "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" That is what Easter is all about: "That Jesus whom you crucified has defeated death forever. He meets you as the risen one so that we may all rise again." This is Easter! An event for the whole world, for all men and women of all times: the global Gospel. We Christians have the exhilarating and also dramatic task - not a few Christians have paid for this proclamation with their lives - of communicating this message to everyone: the victory of good over evil, of love over hatred, of liberation over oppression, of justice over injustice, of life over death. We must do so not through force of arms, but only through the weak power of love, that love that leads to giving one's life for others, not to taking life away.

This has always been the historic mission of Christians, and today more than ever. It would be very serious to betray that mission, even if only with the resignation to war. That is why the division of Christians in Europe (Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants) is all the more scandalous. It is supporting the conflict. We will all answer for it before God! I have not forgotten what the great Patriarch Athenagoras (the one who embraced Paul VI in Jerusalem) used to say: "Sister Churches, brother peoples". And we may add: "Divided Churches, divided peoples".

Jesus accepted crucifixion to show the world the reason for living: to love others more than oneself. This is the only force that unites even those who are different. This is the only force that brings the world to the path of peace. This is the only force that raises people from the "hells" of this world. In the Christian-Orthodox tradition there is an icon of the Resurrection which depicts Jesus, after his descent into hell, stretching out his arms in the darkness of death in order to draw Adam and Eve out with him. This is the work that the Risen One accomplished on Holy Saturday. Christian tradition says that he "descended into hell". So, on Holy Saturday Jesus descends into the countless "hells" of this world and asks us to descend with him to free their prisoners.

I don't like the popular saying, "Christmas with your folks and Easter with whoever you want." I disagree. We must say: "Christmas with the poor and Easter in the hells of this world"! I mean, in the nearby hells: I am thinking of the elderly confined and abandoned in solitude who cannot receive visitors, or also of the countless men and women who are alone, homeless and loveless. I am also talking about the more distant hells, where millions of Ukrainian men and women live, inside and outside the country; the countless hells that exist in Africa, in the Middle East (who can remember Syria anymore?), the refugee camps everywhere in the world that are open-air "hells", or the dramatic

suburbs of megalopolises without services (I cannot forget the dramatic images of Haiti). And how many other hells there are!

This is the Easter that the whole world needs: believing men and women, or men and women of good will, who descend with the Risen One into the darkness of the hells of this world to reach up and rescue everyone. We must empty those hells. This means wishing everyone "Happy Easter!". Just imagine if all, but really all, the Christians in the world, even if they disagree on everything else, and all men of good will, could say with one voice and at the same time on Easter Day: war does not save anything nor anyone. War strengthens no identity, no coexistence, no religion. War protects no civilization, no prosperity, no tradition. Because war poisons all wells, at all latitudes. In this collective confession of the contagion that war spreads everywhere, the courageous proclamation of faith takes on light and gives strength. So it makes sense to wish everyone "Happy Easter!". We do so also from the pages of *Il Riformista*.

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