



God reaffirms life and gives us hope

LWF Easter Message 2020

by Nestor Paulo Friedrich

And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. (Mark 16:2-4)



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Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

I write this message during of the coronavirus pandemic. We are in quarantine. From our homes, we monitor the progression of the number of infected and the increasing number of deaths. There is

a considerable effort to inform and guide the population on how to prevent contagion. The order is to stay at home. At the start of this crisis, the reactions were diverse. Some people downplayed the problem; others invented “political-economic” conspiracy narratives, others still were opportunistic, offering fundamentalist religious promises of salvation in “their prosperity churches.” Yes, we know that in these moments, it is essential to remain calm, not to despair, and to be serene and balanced. However, there is no way to hide our fragility. The heart is filled with fear, and the sense of insecurity grows. How can we account for what lies ahead? Who will remove this stone?

Nature is giving us a hard lesson. Suddenly the world became smaller. We are more interconnected and interdependent than we thought. We rediscover our humanity and all its inherent contradictions. The pandemic unveils the unequal world we live in. It provides proof of the deep crisis of the current neoliberal economic model, the inefficiency of politics, and the crisis of the State as a safeguard for the common good and social justice. It reveals our sinful human nature. It challenges us to return to theological concepts such as personal and structural sin that, at this moment, reveal its cruel and terrifying face. The coronavirus does not respect people, and its impact on different populations will be disparate. Not only personal health but also our sustainability, “our daily bread,” is at stake. Who will remove the stone?

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Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome wake up early. They walk with hearts full of fear! They are going to anoint Jesus’ body. The past few days have been intense. They have experienced the hell and hate that tortured, crucified, and killed Jesus! How can they not be afraid and scared by such a destructive power? Their hearts, once filled with hope, carry frustration, anguish, grief, and enormous sadness! In Jesus’ company, they experienced open horizons and restoration of their identities. With Jesus, they experienced unconditional love. In Jesus’ company, they experienced a merciful God who observed and received those who were never seen or welcomed. They experienced God’s forgiveness bringing true peace to overcome fear. As a last gesture of love the women will embalm his body.

When they arrive at the tomb entrance, they are surprised. The stone has been removed. A young man dressed in white tells them not to be afraid. Jesus is resurrected. The young man asks the women

to tell the disciples and Peter and to go to Galilee. There they will see Jesus, as he had told them.

Nobody expected the miracle of the resurrection. The massive stone covering the entrance of the tomb, humanly speaking, was the end of the story. Again, God surprises us, just as in the Exodus and Christmas experiences. These events defy human logic. God resurrects Jesus! God reaffirms life as the greatest expression of his Kingdom.

Fear and unbelief is transformed by the miracle of the resurrection. It opens the disciples' eyes, warming their hearts, and setting them on the way to proclaim that the Lord has risen.

The resurrection experience gives them a new direction and renews their hope. It allows them to look to the world, life, and themselves with fresh eyes. It enables them to face life during challenges and the inevitable intrinsic sufferings. It allows them to carry the cross and face the crosses arising as a consequence of human sin.

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God does not raise Jesus from the dead and remove the stone so that we may remain passive in the face of sin that crucifies Jesus. Faith in Jesus Christ does not fade in the face of death! In pain, we meet again with God and rediscover our brothers and sisters as neighbors. We witness signs of hope amid the pain caused by the coronavirus. We see expressions of solidarity, initiatives to prevent the spread of the virus, communion lived virtually to worship God and to pray, expressions of gratitude to people working in health care, efforts to mitigate losses, signs of love, acting with objectivity and respect. Today's reality challenges us to reflect and to embrace new attitudes towards life that God, in His grace, has given to us. It will be unwise, in the light of the Gospel, to face the coronavirus ignoring, for instance, the voices of young people that denounce the ongoing climate collapse.

The end of Mark 16 takes us back to the beginning of the gospel: returning to Galilee, starting over. Why? Because Jesus Christ is alive. Because we believe in the gospel because God removes the stones that try to keep us in death. Because we have hope.

May the word of Christ comfort and hold us in God's peace, may it give us the serenity we need during this time of pandemic that is full of pain, losses, grief, uncertainty, and suffering. May God give us wisdom and inspire us to be witnesses of life with attitudes that

express mercy and love springing from faith in God! Christ tells us: “the right time has come, and the Kingdom of God is near; turn away from your sins and believe the Good News!” (Mark 1.15).

Amen!

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