

If Only - by Sr. Margaret Dorgan, DCM

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IF ONLY

The long weeks of Lent, with their often heavy emphasis on Christ's suffering, now give way to a celebration of the power of the Resurrection. Some people, who should be commended, put much energy into the Lenten observances, assigning stretches of time for religious practices. Then when the Alleluias of Easter sound, they may go back to an ordinary regime which does not involve that much input of prayer and spiritual reflection.

Oh, but the Alleluias are calling us with loud insistence to enter the wonder of Jesus' Rising, to make it an integral part of each succeeding day. Paschaltide carries special graces that summon us to glory. As believers, we have been initiated into the full Christian mysteries. Let us set aside some of this Eastertide to bask in the eternal wonder that permeates the warmer spring hours.

These weeks we can open our Bibles to the Acts of the Apostles, those exhilarating chapters about the beginnings of the church of Jesus Christ. We see how it grows from a small number to an astonishing expansion of converts, drawn by an outpouring of the Holy Spirit and through the apostles' preaching and miraculous deeds. This account is much more than long-ago history. The words are urging us to follow in the footsteps of those first-century disciples who knew they had an assignment from Jesus to make Him known to everyone they encountered.

To assist us in this task so many centuries later, we turn to Pope Paul VI's apostolic exhortation, *On Evangelization in the Modern World*, a moving document, perhaps the most important message of his pontificate. "There is no doubt," he writes, "that the effort to proclaim the Gospel to the people of today, who are buoyed up by hope but at the same time often oppressed by fear and distress, is a service rendered to the Christian community and also to the whole of humanity."

The Good News is not something we hug to ourselves, delighting in its liberating message that we ponder in private. It is a treasure meant to be shared wherever we see poverty, material or spiritual. The energy communicated by Christ's Rising invigorates us and opens our awareness to the needs of others. We, imperfect as we are, have been called to deliver Jesus invitation, "Come to me all you who labor and are heavily burdened and I will refresh you." (Mt 11:28).

Like the first Christians, we are designated as "witnesses...even to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8) though we inhabit a very different world from that described in the Acts of the Apostles. Pope Paul VI acknowledges this difference, declaring in words full of an urgency which never fades with the passing years. "The conditions of the society in which we live oblige all of us to revise methods, to seek by every means to study how we can bring the Christian message to modern men and women.... It is absolutely necessary for us to take into account a heritage of faith that the Church has the duty of preserving in its untouchable purity, and of presenting it

to the people of our time, in a way that is as understandable and persuasive as possible.”

Contemporary society pursues many objectives which ultimately do not satisfy the human spirit. We see how often people are deceived as they strive for what is devoid of real worth. The Good News Jesus proclaims opens up the gates of our understanding to what will give enduring meaning and truth to our mortal life.

The pope presents us in this document with what he terms “three burning questions,” a trio we should examine closely.

“1. In our day, what has happened to that hidden energy of the Good News, which is able to have a powerful effect on the human conscience?

2. To what extent and in what way is that evangelical force capable of really transforming the people of our century?

3. What methods should be followed so the Gospel's power can take effect?”

As it devises valid systems of persuasion, the whole church is obliged to deal with these questions. We must be challenged by them, too, on a local level, in our parishes and in the small sphere of our personal lives. The power of the Gospel is not meant to be hidden in a corner.

Let us travel through space and time to join Jesus as He was described in John's Gospel, seated beside a well in far-off Samaria. He enters into conversation with an unknown, unevangelized woman who has come to draw water there. “If only you knew the gift of God,” He tells her. (Jn 4:10).

If only, if only... We pray that each day we may recognize yet more what God is giving us in Jesus Christ. We ask Him to help us lead others, as He led her, to a recognition of their Savior.

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