

Rome, April 3rd, 2021

Dear confreres, sisters, lay Xaverians and friends all,

to celebrate the Lord's Paschal solemnity is one of the greatest gifts we receive from God. Discovering and rediscovering the fact that Life won over death changes the existential orientation of the one who experiences such discovery. This is what happened to the first disciples and the same holds true for anyone who is trustfully open to the novelty of God in human history.

The Gospels describe the Lord's resurrection as the central event in the life of the disciples. Despite having forsaken Him at the moment of His passion and death, they are now gathered in the Cenacle, recounting how the Lord showed Himself to them. "I have seen the Lord", "We have seen the Lord", "My Lord and my God." The Church, yeast of God's Reign within humanity, was born out of this Paschal encounter.

There is a 'before' and an 'after'. What they have lived with Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem, in the period that precedes His death, is now seen and reinterpreted on the basis of this personal and community experience. What Jesus did and said, the way He lived, are true and eternal.

The earliest disciples' experience of the Lord's resurrection remains for us the paradigm upon which every Christian life originates, grows and becomes stronger. To meet the risen One, the living Lord, and to experience Him is the starting point for every development of a life in God. Nobody else can make this experience in our stead. Concerning this point, I like to remember a story by Anthony de Mello. It is titled *The Map of the Amazon River* and this is how it goes:

"An explorer returned to his people, who were eager to know about the Amazon. But how could he ever put into words the feelings that flooded his heart when he saw exotic flowers and heard the night-sounds of the forests; when he sensed the danger of wild beasts or paddled his canoe over treacherous rapids?

He said, 'Go and find out for yourselves. Nothing can substitute personal risk and personal experience.' Nevertheless, to guide them he drew a map of the Amazon River. They pounced upon the map. They framed it in their town hall. They made copies of it for themselves. And all who had a copy considered themselves experts on the Amazon River, for did they not know its every turn and bend, how broad it was and how deep, where the rapids were and where the falls? The explorer lived the rest of his days regretting having drawn that map. It would have been better if he had drawn nothing".

In rereading the Gospels' account of the resurrection, I would like to underline in particular three points that may help us to encounter and re-encounter the Lord every day of our life in the same way as it has been for the earliest disciples, with

that freshness, spontaneity and authoritativeness which characterised their first meeting.

1. **“Early in the morning”**. All four Gospels stress this fact. Talking about the dawn, about the early morning, manifests a deep and passionate desire to see the body of Jesus. It is such a desire that characterises the true believer. Meeting the risen Lord is a gift. However, this gift must be searched with all one’s heart, with all one’s intelligence and with all one’s strength. As soon as one makes the first step, He comes toward us.

2. **“What are all these things that you are discussing as you walk along?”** The two disciples are heading towards Emmaus. They talk about what happened in Jerusalem and, we suppose, about their self-deception. Then, unexpectedly, another person joins them and walks along with them. This is how God behaves: he gets silently closer, without imposing Himself. He comes into their lives without hurting their sentiments. And so it is that, almost without having them realise it, He gains their acceptance, so much so that they do not want to part from Him. In this manner, as they walk along, little by little, He leads them to the discovery of what is hidden from their eyes.

In following Christ, on the one hand, it is necessary to be open to novelty, to the unexpected, and not remain close in oneself, in one’s certainties. On the other hand, humbleness is required in order to be led to the Truth. Humbleness makes us disciples. In the heart of he who is full of himself there is no place for others, let alone for God.

3. **“Do not be unbelieving any more but believe”**; **“Simon son of John, do you love me?”** Thomas and Simon Peter realise their own weakness and fragility, their own sin. It is hard for them to accept such an experience. Nonetheless, only when they accept it, they meet God’s salvation in Jesus Christ.

To accept the dark side of our human reality, that which in practice denies and does not love God, is not easy because it touches upon one’s pride and the idealised image we make of ourselves. Only by peacefully accepting one’s fragility and sinfulness, even when this may be painful, one can experience the salvation of God who gets closer to us and loves us. This is the starting point from where true missionary witness sets off: recounting and sharing the good God has done in our life and the good He continues doing to us now.

We are going through a particular moment: on the one hand, we are facing the Covid pandemic but, on the other, we are celebrating a year of grace for our Xaverian family. In this context, let us allow God to love us through the Lord Jesus Christ. The quality and significance of the Xaverian vocation depend on it.

Best wishes of a happy and holy Easter!

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