



**Pastoral Letter
Fifth Sunday of Lent
21 March 2021
On the Paschal Mystery**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Today we hear Jesus say these words, 'Now the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified'. Our Lord is not stumbling towards the events of Holy Week, but resolutely responding to his heavenly Father's will. He knows that 'unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest.' Within this simple agricultural image, there is a dying and a profoundly new fruitful life.

Perhaps we are used to the idea that God saved us through the Paschal Mystery; this is the dying and rising of Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Church. But what does this mean for us today? Is all this just a complicated theological idea, something which took place in the past, or is this lived experience? We may know in our heads something of the doctrine. Do we know in our hearts, experience of sharing in the new life Jesus has won for us?

We are redeemed by the blood of Christ! This means our Saviour has paid a price for us. We recognise our human weaknesses, but then tell ourselves there is little to be done about the state we find ourselves in. Recognising that a ransom has been paid for us means we can rejoice in this truth, that our God wants us to enjoy the freedom and new life which is his desire for us. The Cross is God's weapon against our fallen human nature. The Lord never gave up on us, and saving grace has real power to work in every situation of our lives. Jesus nailed to the Cross all our sins. And since this event, many have experienced the power of Christ's sacrifice to change their everyday lives. For sure, this is a life-long journey, but we are encouraged by the small steps we make in discipleship when we seek the living power of Christ's blood to transform our lives. The Cross has real authority to change real lives. The sacrifice of Christ's blood can also change communities and institutions, structures and organisations.

The resurrection of Jesus has won new life for us. Maybe we are inclined to believe this event is simply historical fact, but certainly does not touch my

life today. The apostle Paul puts the whole truth of Easter in these words, 'If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.' (Rom 8.11) Imagine that! The same power which raised Jesus' dead body on Easter Sunday is at work in our lives today through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

We experience the glory of the Paschal Mystery, our own personal share in Christ's death, resurrection and the gift of Pentecost, when we gather together to celebrate the holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Here we are present at Calvary, at the empty tomb, in Jerusalem for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Through receiving Holy Communion, sacramentally or spiritually, we are filled with the force of these saving events. When we are faced with temptation and sin, and we reach out to receive God's all-embracing mercy in the Sacrament of Penance, we imbibe the power of Jesus' dying and rising.

And so we might say of the resurrection, Christ alive has real authority to change real lives. The Holy Spirit can also change communities in institutions, structures and organisations. Fine talk, so let's bring all this nearer to home. What does it look like for you and me to receive the grace which flows from the Cross, to step through faith into the life of Easter, to be open to the Holy Spirit at work in our diocese, in our parish and other communities? It means that everything we do as a local church, is about mission, about reaching out to others in a variety of different ways and with a variety of gifts. And so I pray that each and every one of us may experience the outpouring of blessings which flow from the Paschal Mystery. Only when I witness joy-filled communities reaching out to others to share with them what we ourselves have received, will I know my prayer has been answered.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

+ *David*

Bishop of Northampton

Given at Northampton on Saturday of the Third Week of Lent
and appointed to be read or distributed in all churches and chapels of the
Diocese on the Fifth Sunday of Lent, 20th and 21st March, 2021