

The Mystery of Faith and the Glory of Easter

"Dying you destroyed our death; Rising you restored our life, Lord Jesus, come in glory." Embodied in these words from the Holy Liturgy, in which the gathered community intones upon hearing the call of the deacon, "Let us proclaim the mystery of faith," is the very heart of the Christian experience. The Mystery of Faith, which we encounter in the very act of celebrating the Eucharist, is summed up in these very words which we sing or recite week after week at the table of Jesus Christ.

This is the Paschal Mystery of Christ in which we participate every time we gather as the People of God to partake of the Eucharistic bread and wine that has become for us the body and blood of Christ, that is, the very life of Christ among us and then within us. This is the moment when our holy communion with God and one another is fully realized in the Risen Christ. It is the moment we recognize Christ is truly among us in the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup, his body broken, his blood poured out. It is a sacred moment when we glimpse the inbreaking of the "age to come" into the here and now of our lives in this present age of suffering and death which is already passing away as God's new creation is now coming into being in our very midst.

The paschal Mystery of Christ is that decisive act of God in Christ that saves God's beloved humanity from the tyranny of death and sin. In some mysterious way that we cannot even begin to fully comprehend, the suffering and dying of Jesus sets us free from our complicity with evil, of which our many sins are but the evidence of humankind's "yes" to the angelic lie of the evil one who has held us hostage throughout this present evil age. And by rising from the dead Jesus delivers the decisive and fatal blow to death itself. In so doing He restores to us the essence of life, which is His life in us.

We participate in this saving action of Christ by our baptism in the waters whereby we die with Christ in his death and are raised to new life in Christ through the gift of the Holy Spirit which is the divine guarantee to us that God will complete our salvation by the resurrection of our own bodies when this age finally passes away and we behold the New Heavens and the New Earth with the descent of the Holy City of the New Jerusalem coming down from out of heaven to rest upon the Earth in which God will dwell forever with the human race, the perfect consummation of the communion of heaven and earth, of divinity and humanity, the ultimate

divinization not only of the new humanity but of the whole universe. Salvation is inclusive of the entire cosmos not just a few million human souls. Our salvation is the coming of the new creation where all evil and the power of death will be no more. The thought of the coming of this new world, this new age, is incomprehensible to us for all we have ever known is this present existence. It is staggering to even try to imagine this new creation. And yet it remains our deepest hope and our greatest longing.

At Easter we celebrate another part of this mystery, namely the resurrection of Christ from the dead. The resurrection is not merely God's validation of the person and work of His holy son, Jesus, but it is the very beginning of the new age. Christ becomes the first fruits of the new creation which now has already come upon us in him. This also marks the beginning of the end of the old creation that has been held in bondage to corruption and decay for countless millennia.

Oh, my beloved sisters and brothers in Christ, this is the Mystery of Faith that we proclaim. It is this mystery which is already at work within us, and to which we are called to live out in the here and now of our lives. It is this mystery that enables us to become co-workers with Christ and one another in the ushering in of this new creation. We have become agents of God's light illuminating the darkness of the world through our faithful witness to this coming reality of God's reign and the ongoing work of bringing God's justice and peace to our broken and suffering world. This is the Mystery of Faith. It is the Gospel we proclaim. It is the witness we bear to the world concerning that mystery "which is Christ in you the hope of glory."

So let us never cease in praying the words of this prayer, for in so doing we proclaim the glory of the Easter we celebrate: "Dying you destroyed our death; rising you restored our life; Lord Jesus, come in glory."

Yours in the service of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,

+Peter

Pastor of Saint Matthew Church of Orange California
Presiding Bishop of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion