

The Holy Week this year started with painful and sad events. It started with terrorist attacks during Palm Sunday prayers. These attacks led to the killing of many Egyptians who were worshipping in the Churches in Tanta and Alexandria. Sadness overshadowed us all especially when we saw the blood-stained palms of the worshippers. Tears came out of our eyes. Our neighbours came to give us condolences for those who were martyred.

At that time, I felt that the Church in Egypt was carrying the Cross of death and following Jesus Christ who took **"... the form of a servant, ... And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."** Philippians 2:6-8 (ESV). I also felt that the Church in Egypt was carrying the Cross with Christ in a similar way, like Simon of Cyrene, on the way to Golgotha.

We know very well that dying on the Cross is not just painful and sad. It is shameful. But tonight, we have come to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. We have come to realise and to trust that Jesus Christ, through His resurrection, has broken the sting of death.

We would not be here today if the Passion Week stopped at Palm Sunday or Good Friday. We could not have the confidence to shout "Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed!" The song which we are going to sing later this evening, says, **"If your story of love ended at the Cross, I would not be alive and shouting now "Christ is risen!"**" The resurrection of Christ does not allow us to stop at sadness, pain, tears and the darkness of the grave. It forces us towards light, joy and hope. The words of that song also say, **"How can I stay miserable at Golgotha while the sun of hope has dawned and our Lord Christ has risen?"**

My beloved, we cannot stay at the sadness of last Sunday, like those who have no hope. Instead, we, holding onto the hope of resurrection, need to move forward, proclaiming that Christ is risen! As Jesus was raised from the dead, those martyrs will also be raised, and we, the believers, will also be raised with them at the last day. The Book of Revelation records what John had seen. Revelation 20:4-6 says, **"..And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God."** **"The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years."** (ESV)

My beloved, the resurrection of Christ transformed the fears and sadness of the Marys and the disciples into joy and boldness to witness to the ends of the world. The power of the resurrection is able to transform our fear and sadness into confidence and joy.

A few months ago, I had the privilege of meeting a mother of two young adults who were martyred. They were among the 21 people who were beheaded by ISIS at the shores of Libya. She said to me, "I trust my sons are alive with Christ. I thank God they did not denounce Christ in order to avoid beheading. I am proud of them." One would ask, from where, how this simple lady had such confidence that her sons are alive with Christ. There is

no doubt her faith in the resurrection of Christ lies behind her confidence and peace that fills her heart.

Stephen, the first martyr of the church of Christ was driven outside the city by the Jews. They stoned him because he was witnessing for Jesus. Luke wrote in the Book of Acts that Stephen, while being stoned, looked at the sky, full of the Holy Spirit, saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. This helped him to overcome the pain of stoning and death. Instead, he asked God to forgive those who were stoning him. If Stephen didn't see the risen Christ, he would not have such hope and courage in the face of stoning.

Beloved, we need to have this goal that Paul chose for his life, “.. **that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,**” Philippians 3: 10 (ESV). Knowing Christ and experiencing the power of His resurrection helps us to share in His sufferings and death without fear or worry. Christ, who overcame death by rising again, is able to “**...always lead us in triumphal procession, and through us spread the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.**” 2 Corinthians 2:14 (ESV)

My beloved, Christ is risen, and He is alive now. So now, with this confidence, let us not be afraid of those who kill the flesh and after that cannot do anything anymore. As we pray today for comfort for the families of the martyrs, and the injured, so that they may experience God's healing touch, let us also pray for divine protection for our beloved Egypt.

Let us, by the power of the resurrection plant love instead of hatred, request forgiveness for all who harm us and work with persistence for the welfare of our beloved country. In this way, we would overcome terrorism and proclaim that Jesus is alive because He is **Risen Indeed.**

+Mouneer