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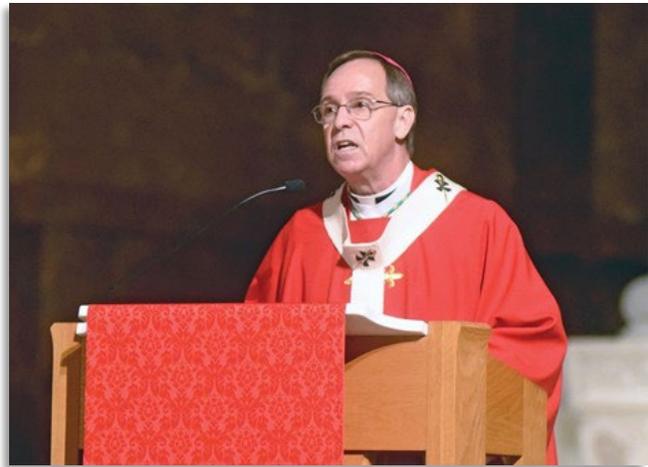
The Church in Central and Southern Indiana

Leadership Briefing

By Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

Easter joy is born anew through the Resurrection

The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ, joy is constantly born anew (Pope Francis, “Evangelii Gaudium,” #1).



The publication date for this Leadership Briefing is April 15, Good Friday. This may be the saddest day of the Church’s year, but it is not joyless. Good Friday is joyful because it celebrates a beginning, not an ending. It is an affirmation of life and of the love that is stronger than death itself.

We are right to be sad today as we recall the humiliation, torture and brutality of our Lord’s death on a cross. But we’re also right to seek and find the Easter joy that is constantly born anew during this sacred time.

Our faith tells us that the death of Jesus set us free. Because he suffered and died for us, we are “free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness.” That in itself should be cause for joy. But the real source of our joy is the personal encounter with Jesus that was made possible because of his death on this holy day and his resurrection three days later.

In the coming weeks, throughout the Easter season, we will hear once again the wonderful stories of Jesus’ appearances to his disciples and friends—in the garden near the empty tomb, in the upper room behind locked doors, by the Sea of Galilee where the Lord cooked breakfast for his disciples, and on the road to Emmaus where he was recognized in the breaking of the bread.

These joy-filled encounters with Jesus, the risen Lord, are made possible in spite of his ignominious death on the cross. His selfless sacrifice on Good Friday earned forgiveness for our sins and allowed Easter joy to fill our hearts in the place of guilt or sorrow or despair.

Good Friday reminds us that we have been ransomed by the cross of Christ. The unending love of God has shattered the walls of our prisons and shown us the way out. Sin and death have been overcome by the selfless love of Christ, and no one ever has to be condemned to unending death again.

This is why on Easter Sunday we rejoice in the cross of Christ, why we sing alleluia, and why we give thanks to God for the gift of his saving grace. We have been liberated by the risen Christ. As a result, no one can ever take away our fundamental rights or our dignity as the free daughters and sons of the living God!

The freedom we have been given as a result of Christ's death on the cross is a gift that has to be nurtured and developed. Left untended, freedom too easily becomes confused with license, the notion that we can do whatever we want without suffering any consequences. We mistake freedom for a sense of entitlement that persuades us that we deserve everything that has been given to us—without regard to the sacrifices of others.

But true freedom is the opposite of an irresponsible sense of license or entitlement. True freedom is a gift that we must cherish and take seriously. True freedom, when we recognize it, is a source of joy and gratitude because we know how rare it is and how easy it is to lose this precious gift as a result of our own carelessness.

This Easter, let's thank God for the gift of freedom. Let's resolve to be good stewards of this precious gift. And let's combine our experiences of Easter joy constantly born anew with a sober recognition that our freedom is something we can easily lose sight of if we begin to take it for granted.

Our freedom was paid for by the cross of Christ. It has been maintained for 2,000 years by the blood of the martyrs and by the selfless love and sacrifices of all those faithful Christians who have gone before us. Let us rejoice and be glad that we are truly free! But let's also remember that we are responsible for taking care of our freedom and for sharing it generously.

Let's nurture our freedom, and share it with others, by being faithful witnesses to the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. The cross of Christ has saved us and set us free. That's reason enough to be joyful even on Good Friday. But the muted joy we experience today will increase exponentially.

Very soon, in just two days, we will shout Alleluia! Christ our joy is risen!

+Charles C. Thompson
Archbishop of Indianapolis

Stations of the Cross

Adapted from Stations of the Cross 2020 prepared for Pope Francis by the chaplaincy of the 'Due Palazzi' House of Detention in Padua, Italy.



The traditional 14 stations are each listed below. Each station should be preceded by the traditional antiphon: *We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you. Because by your holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.* After each station, we are invited to pray an Our Father, a Hail Mary, and the Glory Be.

First Station

Jesus is condemned to death

Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus; but they shouted out, “Crucify, crucify him!” A third time he said to them, “Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no crime deserving death; I will therefore chastise him and release him.” But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. So Pilate gave sentence that their demand should be granted. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, whom they asked for; but Jesus he delivered up to their will (Lk 23:20-25).

Let us pray. *O God, lover of life, in the sacrament of Reconciliation, you always give us a new opportunity to experience your infinite mercy. We ask you to grant us the gift of wisdom so that we can see every man and woman as a temple of your Spirit and respect their inviolable dignity. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Second Station

Jesus takes up his Cross

The soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the praetorium); and they called together the whole battalion. And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and plaiting a crown of thorns they put it on him. And they began to salute him, “Hail, King of the Jews!” And they struck his head with a reed, and spat upon him, and they knelt down in homage to him. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak, and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him (Mk 15:16-20).

Let us pray. *O God, our justice and our redemption, who gave us your only Son and glorified him on the throne of the cross, instill your hope in our hearts so that we can recognize you present in the dark moments of our life. Comfort us in every affliction and support us in our trials as we await the coming of your kingdom. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Third Station

Jesus falls for the first time

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all (Is 53:4-6).

Let us pray. *O God, you raised mankind up when we had fallen. We ask you to come to help us in our weakness and to grant us eyes to see the signs of your love everywhere in our daily lives. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Fourth Station

Jesus meets his Mother

Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home (Jn 19:25-27).

Let us pray. *O Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church, faithful disciple of your Son, we turn to you and entrust to your loving gaze and to the care of your maternal heart the cry of all humanity which awaits with anguish the day when every tear will be wiped away from their faces. Amen.*

Fifth Station

Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry the Cross

As they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus (Lk 23:26).

Let us pray. *O God, defender of the poor and comforter of the afflicted, strengthen us with your presence and help us to bear each day the easy yoke of your commandment of love. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Sixth Station

Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

My heart says to you, “Your face, Lord, do I seek”. Hide not your face from me. Turn not your servant away in anger, you who have been my help. Cast me not off, forsake me not, O God of my salvation! (Ps 27:8-9).

Let us pray. *O God, true light and source of all light, in weakness you reveal the power and radicalism of love. Imprint your face in our hearts, so that we can recognize you in all human suffering. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Seventh Station

Jesus falls for the second time

Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do”. And they cast lots to divide his garments (Lk 23:34).

Let us pray. *O God, you do not leave us in the darkness and shadow of death. Strengthen us in our weakness, free us from the bonds of evil and shield us by your power, so that we may forever sing of your mercy. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Eighth Station

Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem

There followed him a great multitude of the people, and of women who bewailed and lamented him. But Jesus turning to them said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed!’ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us’; and to the hills, ‘Cover us’” (Lk 23:27-30).

Let us pray. *O God, Father of all kindness, you do not abandon your children in the trials of life. Give us the grace to be able to rest in your love and to enjoy forever the consolation of your presence. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Ninth Station

Jesus falls for the third time

It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. Let him sit alone in silence when he has laid it on him; let him put his mouth in the dust – there may yet be hope; let him give his cheek to the one who strikes him, and be filled with insults. For the Lord will not cast off

forever, but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love (Lam 3:27-32).

Let us pray. *O God, strength of those who hope in you, you give peace to those who follow your teachings. Sustain our staggering steps, raise us when we fall through our unfaithfulness. Pour the balm of consolation and the wine of hope on our wounds. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Tenth Station

Jesus is stripped of his garments

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus they took his garments and made four parts, one for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was without seam, woven from top to bottom; so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the Scripture, "They parted my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots" (Jn 19:23-24)

Let us pray. O God, you set us free by your truth. Strip us of our interior resistance and clothe us with your light, that we may be the reflection of your glory in the world. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Eleventh Station

Jesus is nailed to the Cross

When they came to the place which is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on the right and one on the left. And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do". And they cast lots to divide his garments. And the people stood by, watching; but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him vinegar, and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews". One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong". And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingly power". And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise"(Lk 23:33-43).

Let us pray. *O God, source of mercy and forgiveness, who reveal yourself in the sufferings of humanity, enlighten us with the grace that flows from the wounds of the Crucified One and grant us perseverance in faith throughout the dark night of trial. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

The Twelfth Station

Jesus dies on the Cross

It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit". And having said this he breathed his last (Lk 23:44-46).

Let us pray. *O God, King of justice and peace, you heard in the cry of your Son the cry of all humanity. Teach us not to identify the person with the wrong he has done and help us to see in everyone the living flame of your Spirit. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

The Thirteenth Station

Jesus is taken down from the Cross

Now there was a man named Joseph from the Jewish town of Arimathea. He was a member of the council, a good and righteous man, who had not consented to their purpose and deed, and he was looking for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud, and laid him in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever yet been laid (Lk 23:50-53).

Let us pray. *O God, beginning and end of all things, in the Passover of Christ you redeemed all humanity. Grant us the wisdom of the Cross that we may abandon ourselves to your will with a spirit of joy and gratitude. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

The Fourteenth Station

Jesus is laid in the tomb

It was the day of Preparation, and the sabbath was beginning. The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and saw the tomb, and how his body was laid; then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the sabbath they rested according to the commandment (Lk 23:54-56).

Let us pray. *O God, eternal light and endless day, fill with your blessings those who devote themselves to your praise and to the service of those who suffer in the countless places of human pain and sorrow. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

A Message from Pope Francis

God is at our side in every affliction, in every fear; no evil, no sin will ever have the final word. God triumphs, but the palm of victory passes through the wood of the cross. For the palm and the cross are inseparable. Let us ask for the grace to be amazed. A Christian life without amazement becomes dreary.



What about us? Can we still be moved by God's love? Have we lost the ability to be amazed by him? Maybe our faith has grown dull from habit. Maybe we remain trapped in our regrets and allow ourselves to be crippled by our disappointments. Maybe we have lost all our trust or even feel worthless. But behind all these 'maybes' lies the fact that we are not open to the gift of the Spirit who gives us the grace of amazement.

Let us gaze upon Jesus on the cross and say to him: 'Lord, how much you love me! How precious I am to you!' Let us be amazed by Jesus so that we can start living again, for the grandeur of life lies not in possessions and asserting oneself, but in realizing that we are loved.

(Excerpts from Pope Francis's 2021 Holy Week Message)

My Prayer for You

With Pope Francis, let us pray:

O God, Almighty Father, in Jesus Christ your Son you assumed the wounds and sufferings of humanity. Today I have the courage to beseech you, like the good thief: "Remember me!"

I am here, alone before you, in the dark of this prison: poor, naked, hungry and despised, and I ask you to pour out upon my wounds the balm of forgiveness and consolation, and the wine of a solidarity that strengthens the heart. Heal me with your grace and teach me hope in the midst of despair.

My Lord and my God, I believe; help my unbelief. Merciful Father, continue to trust in me, to give me fresh opportunities, to embrace me in your infinite love. With your help and by the gift of the Holy Spirit, I too will be able to recognize you and serve you in my brothers and sisters. Amen.

+ Charles C. Thompson