



Fra Donatus Forkan
Priore Generale

TO THE WHOLE ORDER

EASTER 2010

Rome, 4 April 2010
Prot No PG026 /2010

**“The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!”
(Luke 24:34)**

My dear brothers and sisters in Hospitality,

We are preparing to celebrate the principal feast of our faith, *Easter*. For us Christians the liturgy of Holy Week is the richest in terms of its orientation towards both religious and human suffering, which touch all of us intensely. It is a time when the celebration of the Pascal Mystery reaches its climax. It is a journey that is renewed every year in the liturgy where we too enter together with Christ to share the days of his Passion, immersing ourselves in his death in order to rise again with him to new life.

During the 40 days of Lent leading up to the events of Holy Week and Easter Day we engaged in a variety of events. Some of these we followed as members of the parish or religious community, while others were of a more personal nature. All of the events has the objective of reawaking in our inner spiritual being the awesomeness of the events of Good Friday when Jesus ‘*offered his life for me because He loves me*’ (Psalm 18). This is a mystery beyond all understanding that fills one with awe, wonder, joy and thanksgiving. The liturgy during this period calls on us to turn our gaze towards the person of Christ, in whom all of humanity is present. As we witness the drama of His Passion unfolding we are reminded of the drama of our own lives and that of our brothers and sisters.

The Liturgy is not only an action to be followed but an event in which to enter and participate in fully. We are not just mere observers but real participants because it was for us that the events of Holy Week took place and it is in us that the fruits of Holy Week are made visible. As a result of our redemption the liturgies invite us to assume an inner attitude of humble gratitude and filial obedience towards our Heavenly Father. We also express or show genuine respect and love for our neighbor with whom we are united as brothers and sisters because of the events of Holy Week. This love takes the form of service, respect, reconciliation - wishing for the other what we would wish for ourselves. This attitude may be summed up in one word: ***John-of-God-Hospitality***.

Together with the Blessed Virgin, Mother of Sorrows, let us follow the events of Holy Week. Was there ever a parent who suffered as Mary suffered as she watched her son dehumanized, brutalized and murdered before her very eyes? She listened helplessly to his cry of pain, unable to hold him in her motherly arms to comfort him. During this Holy Season let us remember parents who are suffering because of the untimely death of a child due to illness, poverty, violence or suicide. Michelangelo in his famous sculpture *The Pieta*, which can be seen in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, tries to portray the pain of a young mother, Mary, holding in her arms the body of her dead Son, Jesus. This work of art not only depicts Mary's personal grief but that she, as a mother, understands and is close to all parents who suffer because of their children. During this Holy Season let us pray for such parents asking that Our Blessed Lady, Mother of Sorrows and Mother of the Redeemed, will be with these parents to comfort them, to hold them in her motherly arms and strengthen them in their pain.

Each of us is called upon to become protagonists of these events, which safeguard and strengthen our faith. Every woman and man, as indeed all of humanity, has her or his own mystery of pain, a history of sin which Christ suffered for then, and continues to suffer today, until all evil is wiped out and sin and death are defeated. Jesus often spoke about 'his hour', the hour when he would go up to Jerusalem to be handed over, judged, condemned and executed. We have to be on our guard that we do not become indifferent to human suffering and tragedy. Because of instant communication of catastrophes, terrorist attacks and images of dehumanizing poverty around the world we can become immune to, and almost overwhelmed by, the scale and intensity of what is being presented.

The Lord does not see an anonymous mass of human beings, because everyone before him has his own face and his own name. Every human being is known personally by God "I have called you by your name; you are mine". (Isaiah 43:1-2). Hence the importance in this liturgical period of rediscovering the value of the human individual for whom Christ gave his life (John 15:13). The Hospitality which St John of God left as his most precious legacy teaches us just this: *one human being is worth more than the combined treasures of the entire world*. This is the fundamental value or insight that underpins and motivates us in our Hospitaller Mission.

With Christ's resurrection, a new day dawned; something new and wonderful happened that changed the course of world history. It is a reality, an event that was lived and which should continue to be lived in joy and gratitude by all who pride themselves on being CHRISTIANS. Celebrating Easter should help us to understand the dignity of every human being. The dignity of the human being comes from being created in the image and likeness of God and walking together towards that horizon of hope that is Christ, a light that never dims, our peace and our joy. In order to appreciate the profound significance of these events try and find a space, a time to reflect and just *be...*!

When I was a novice I was struck by something that happened during the Holy Week Liturgy in the Chapel of our Psychiatric Hospital in Dublin. During the Pascal Vigil a priest patient sang the Easter Proclamation – the Exultet. This was my first time to hear the Exultet being sung and the priest sang it beautifully, but what impressed me most was the fact that

the priest was suffering greatly in his own personal life, yet he proclaimed the joy, (exulted) of the Risen Lord. The priest even in his pain could sing with profound hope and the joy which the certainty of faith in the Risen Lord is capable of instilling in our hearts.

This is a particularly delicate moment for the Church in the Continent of Europe due to a number of events. May the grace of the Risen Christ instill new hope in everyone in order that faith may bear its fruits in the form of real charity, reconciliation, healing for all with a renewal opportunity for the church. I invite everyone to pray for the Holy Father and the Bishops that they may guide the church entrusted to their care as true witnesses of the Lord who triumphed over sin and death and precedes us on the path towards salvation.

At this time we are celebrating the Provincial Chapters in several parts of our Order and they represent a particular moment of grace for the Provinces but also for all of us. The Chapters held to date have gone well thanks to the serious preparation made and the sincere desire to seek and do God's will. Moreover, in the Chapters in which I took part I noted the greater involvement of our Co-workers who are moved by the desire to invigorate our mission of hospitality still more. This is something to be encouraged at all levels if we are to demonstrate that when we say both Brothers and Co-workers are *united in mission* (General Chapter 2006) it is not just mere words but is something that is actually happening on a daily basis.

For us who are still journeying, Easter has not reached its fullness because we are still like the disciples on the road to Emmaus and like them we pray: "Stay with us" Lord. (Luke 24:29). Our faith assures us that He is with us on our journey and that he will be there to meet us at our journeys end to raise us up in an everlasting embrace of love. He invites us to recognize him in his Word, in the breaking of bread and in every brother and sister whom we meet along our journey through life especially those who have fallen by the wayside and those who are sick or rejected by society. What better way of sharing with them the joy of the Resurrection than by serving them in the manner and spirit of Saint John of God.

I wish you all a very Happy and Peaceful Easter.
May the Risen Lord plant His hope in the heart of each and every one of you!



Br. Donatus Forkan, O.H.
Prior General