



EASTER SUNDAY

THE NEW SHOFAR

He is Risen Indeed - Alleluia! Alleluia!

Let us never take our eyes from the glory of the Cross

From the crucifix to the cross

I wear a crucifix around my neck every day of my life. On many occasions, however, I also wear a crucifix and around my house and office I have many crucifixes across many different rooms. Some of them are, however, crosses. Why the difference and does it have any meaning? Well yes it does. Both of those symbols preach differing messages, both of which are fundamental to our Easter journey. Holy Week began with our *Maundy Thursday* meditations. Then we were encouraged to strip ourselves down to the core in a spiritual sense and to commit ourselves to the service of others. Having removed the self from position number one in our daily thinking, acting and planning – in imitation of Jesus – there is room for the rest of our Holy Week activities and meditation to find room in our hearts. Firmly in our hearts and high on our Easter promises is this commitment to obey the command of Jesus: *go* out into the rest of our lives and *in humility* follow the example of the Lord *by serving all others* as he has just demonstrated.

On the cross Jesus died for our sins - Good Friday

Now we come to the reality behind the crucifix. It is there as a reminder of that great saving moment in human history. Jesus, in fulfilling the prophecies made by the prophets of old, in obedience to the will of his Father, he was handed over into the power of evil people, scourged and crucified for our sins. We say that so often it can pass over as a matter of course. We believe it but rarely spend time pondering the enormity of what God has done for us in the sending of his only Son. He came to re-establish the intimate connections between God and men and women across creation. No longer are we “outside” of the Gates of the Garden of Eden, burdened down by sin, by the hopelessness and pain of a world without meaning. Once again, because of the crucified Christ, we are invited to walk, (as Adam and Eve had walked before us), in the cool of the evening, hand in hand with God.

I wear a crucifix to remind myself of the promises made by God to the Hebrew people during their time in the wilderness and repeated by Jesus. Though cared for, fed, watered and guided by God they complained and turned their backs on him. And so, a fiery serpent was sent among them and the only way to survive death was to look upon a snake raised up on a staff...*everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live.* This is our crucifix. Men and women “bitten” by the sins of this world, distracted by false promises, tempted to replace the role of God in life with all kinds of ideas, hopes and dreams on offer from the world find their lives under threat by darkness have this promise: *everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live.* This is why we venerate the crucifix during our celebrations. It is because we follow the witness of Jesus who humbled himself to die on this very same cross. *We look at him* and find life. This is why I have a crucifix around my neck and at home. It reminds me of the centrality of the death of Christ and the benefits we have from never forgetting the price paid for our freedom.

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The cross is now empty – Christ is Risen Alleluia

Now we see the other spiritual reminder Christians around the world and down over the last two thousand years have used to remind us of our need to give thanks to God and to celebrate the new life we have. There is no figure on our cross. It stands there empty. It points to something that was but an act that never fades away, is never lost because of the new world in which we are living.

When Christians first began to contemplate the mystery of Good Friday, they started by reflecting on the actions of Jesus on the Saturday after the crucifixion. Before he was raised from the grave he, in the words of our creed, *he descended into hell*. *Hell* or *Hades* (*Sheol* in Greek) was the home of the dead, a place existing beyond the vision of God. Here were the holy souls of those who had died in the hope of seeing the glory of God and it was to these tortured souls the dead Jesus went. Not to remain with them but to bring to them the Good News of their freedom. The Hebrew people believed the dead were here (*in the bosom of Abraham*) awaiting their Saviour. In biblical language therefore, Jesus took the keys to the gates of hell, opened those doors (never to be closed again) and set the people free.

And so, the cross around my neck. Jesus has not been confined by the powers of death and sin. *He is not here*. He has been raised! Alleluia! The cross is empty. Its power is not lost nor its message weakened but it's empty frame points us to what Good Friday is saying. Sin and death have no power over the Son of God. Life is what is found in the Risen Christ, life is what is offered to those who *look upon him*. In Christ we live. In the Risen Christ all of our hopes and human yearnings are enriched and enlightened.

Christ has died and Christ is Risen

Christian liturgies have used this proclamation of the Easter message from the very beginning of the Christian mission in the world. It tells us of the reality of Good Friday. There is no doubt Jesus died for our sins. The power of sin over us and over the world is broken. We are a people living in a world where being one on one with God is ours to enjoy. In faith we now live, move, think and act in the presence of God and live under the guiding and empowering love of the God who raised Christ from the grave.

But while the death of Jesus is a past event its impact and purpose continues into the present and beyond. The resurrection remains for us a true mystery. Yes, it was a past event. There were many, many witnesses to the Risen Christ before the Ascension. But as the Acts of the Apostles proclaims with joy and boldness that same Christ *is Risen*. Luke's key characters in Acts preach a *Living Christ*, a Christ who is with us in the joys and pains of our daily living. The Risen Christ is not a Saviour we will meet again only when he returns in glory at the end of time. Christ *lives*, Christ *reigns* from the right hand side of his Father but he *lives and reigns* with us, in us and through us. Without this being a motivating reality for all believers, Easter has no power. It remains a feast like so many others – Queen's Birthday, Anzac Day, Melbourne Cup Day, and so on. But Easter is more, much more.

a Light is shining in the darkness

As is true of all lights we use around our homes, a human action needs to take place before we can rejoice in the light and walk through the darkness. Keep a torch in the cupboard and it is not going to help us find our way to the fuse-box in the middle of the night. We need to locate the torch, turn the switch and then walk in that light. Then we are able to reach our goal and are calmed and comforted throughout the task by the light. Similarly, if we want the blessings of God's promises given to us at Easter, we need to embrace Christ as Risen. We need to take Christ into our lives and not leave him behind in our churches. Life needs to change. We need to take the hard yards of daily Gospel living if we seek Easter glory.

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