

**‘Death with life contended: combat strangely ended.’**

*The Easter Sequence*

It seems baffling that so many people have no time for Christianity and the multi-layered beauty of Catholic dogma and doctrine. No doubt they have their reasons: struggles and sorrows in their own lives, scandals in the Church, lack of scientific proof. The list could go on. Yet perhaps one of the most prevalent obstacles to faith today is the way in which we have all been trained by the tech. giants and the social media barons to give only the most fleeting thought to anything we see or hear. Text and WhatsApp messages, posts on Instagram, emojis, sound bites, and a whole culture of instant access have re-shaped our minds to deal with only the most superficial of encounters with reality. The algorithms are programmed to make us swipe to the next page without pausing or pondering.

But what we have today, on Easter Sunday, demands an altogether different approach if we would have any chance of understanding what Christ’s resurrection truly means. After all, what are we to make of the words from the Paschal Sequence repeated immediately before the Gospel every day of the Easter Octave? ‘Death with life contended: combat strangely ended.’

As Christians we do not believe in a dualistic world where there is both a good God and an evil god. There is only one God, and from Him only good things flow. Death, then, is not the personification or embodiment of evil. Death isn’t the devil in disguise.

Death is a weapon. It is the devil’s chief weapon. He uses this weapon to inflict upon us the final degradation, the collapse of the human body, and the separation of body and soul. In death, we experience the lowest point of our existence and we arrive at the farthest possible point from the God who is life itself. Death completes our alienation from our Creator. At least, that’s how the devil planned it.

Now then, here's the paradox of Easter. The Son of God has come down to earth and entered into our human frailty and has chosen to undergo the very alienation which was Lucifer's work but had never been intended by God in the first place. In so doing, Christ uses the devil's own weapon of death and strikes a deadly blow against that very weapon itself and against Satan who wields that weapon. As a result, although we will all still die, the devil can no longer inflict *permanent* death upon those whom he strikes down. The ultimate power of death has been destroyed, and those who conform themselves to Christ's death in this life will be conformed to resurrected His life in the next.

Perhaps the nearest analogy is the use of antidotes against poisons. For some poisons the antidote is manufactured from the poison itself. This is exactly what Christ has done: He has used death to conquer death, so that St Paul can cry out, 'O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?' (1 Cor 15:55).

Today's world bombards us with images of death – images of war and strife, of famine and depredation, and threats of euthanasia, and so forth – but we Christians have what others do not. We have hope.

Hope is so much more than just a vague wish that things will be better tomorrow. Hope is a theological virtue which, along with faith and charity, is infused into our soul at Baptism. The moment the priest poured water over our heads – even if that was a long time ago – our soul was transformed, and we became anchored in God. Today's feast of Easter tells us what that means. Just as Christ rose to a new and everlasting form of life following His crucifixion, so we who are baptized are anchored – rooted – in that already existing new life. We are, if you like, pinned to the risen Christ so that when our lives here on earth are ended we will be taken up with Him into the highest heaven to live with the Blessed Virgin Mary, and all the angels and saints, in the eternal presence of Almighty God.

This is no mere fairy tale. Mary Magdalene, and the Apostles, and many others besides who had known, and seen, and heard, and touched – or been touched by – Our Lord before He died on the Cross *saw* Christ after He rose from the dead.

St Luke's Gospel warns us that some will not believe even if one should rise again from the dead (Lk 16:31), but we who have come to Mass this morning are here, like Mary Magdalene in the Easter Sequence, to attest to what others have seen and to what we believe.

*Tell us, Mary: say what thou didst see upon the way.*

*The tomb the Living did enclose;*

*I saw Christ's glory as He rose!*

*The angels there attesting; shroud with grave-clothes resting.*

*Christ, my hope, has risen.*

'Christ my hope has risen!' This is why, even in the midst of trials and tribulations, we can look up rather than down, why we can hope rather than be despondent. We know now what the Blessed Virgin Mary knew all along: death does not have the final say, for Christ, her Son, has conquered death and given us a share in an altogether different reality that lasts for ever.

Alleluia!