



Letter of the Minister General

Easter of God 2024

“Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit”

Jn 12:24



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The Paschal Mystery in the World

*To the Friars of the Order
To the Poor Clare and Conceptionist Sisters
To the Franciscan Sisters affiliated to the Order
To the Franciscan Laity*



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

May the Lord give you peace!

This message for Easter 2024 is being published on the Fifth Sunday of Lent, when John's Gospel is proclaimed: *"unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit. Whoever loves their life loses it, and whoever hates their life in this world will preserve it for eternal life"* (Jn 12:24-25).

Together, then, let us look at this interweaving of death and life as we recall the 800th anniversary of the stigmata of St. Francis — those mysterious signs of his loving communion with Christ.

Centred on the Cross

"All the striving of this man of God, whether in public or in private, revolved around the cross of the Lord" (3 C 2,2).

The key to the heart of Francis is the Cross. It is crucial for those who wish to embrace this form of life (ER 1:3); it is the heart of thanksgiving to the Father (ER 23:3); it is the reason for the friars' prayer in churches (Test 5); it is our sole reason for glory (Adm 5); it is 'Perfect Joy'. This is why Francis strongly calls on us to:

"Offer up your bodies and carry His holy cross and follow His most holy commands even to the end" (OfP Psalm VII 7:8).

Clare is on the same wavelength:

"Look upon Him Who became contemptible for you, and follow Him, making yourself contemptible in this world for Him. Gaze, consider, contemplate, desiring to imitate Your Spouse, [Who] though more beautiful than the children of men became, for your salvation, the lowest of men, was despised, struck, scourged untold times throughout His entire body, and then died amid the suffering of the Cross" (2LAg 19-20).

To follow Christ in his abasement is the core of the call of Clare and her sisters, and we also see the same radicality in Francis' own call.

Celebrating the Paschal Mystery of death and resurrection in this year dedicated to the stigmata leads us to re-centre ourselves, as individuals and fraternities, on the glorious cross of the Lord.

We urgently need this attitude today in order to respond to the gift of a Franciscan way of life that is beautiful and attractive, rather than jaded and defeated. "*The Spirit of the Lord and his holy operation*" (LR 10:8) unceasingly urges us to move beyond and overcome the fears and sins that impede us and make us self-focussed.

Let us ask ourselves how we can rediscover the fascination that is necessary for us to choose to lose our lives in generous self-giving as we follow the way of Jesus' Cross and Resurrection.

May the Creator Spirit instil in us the daring and passion to seek contemporary means and initiatives — including new approaches — to live as brothers, sisters, and lesser ones, as contemplatives, in obedience, with nothing of our own and in chastity, as pilgrims in mission among and with the poor.

Gladness and Compassion

St. Bonaventure recounts that while on the Mount of La Verna, Francis "*rejoiced at the gracious way Christ looked upon him under the appearance of the Seraph, but the fact that He was fastened to a cross pierced his soul with a sword of compassionate sorrow*" (LMj XIII, 3).

Francis experiences joy and compassion in his encounter with the Lord, who is serene although fastened to the wood of the Cross. This is a reminder that the Resurrection is not a happy ending after the Cross because, it is in the very act of dying that Christ voluntarily accepts his entry into the abyss of death, entrusting his life to the Father and rising again!

It is in the Spirit that the power of the Resurrection flows through people and creation in various ways. These are the infinite instances of the Paschal Mystery in the world — those signs of life and death in which the Spirit of the Living Christ is present and acts unceasingly, often contrary to all the evidence.

Francis experienced a form of death in his revulsion towards lepers, as well as a resurrection in *'showing mercy'*. Clare experiences this paschal joy in her relationship with her sisters (cf. TestCl 67-70). Both have shown that what is burdensome and bitter can be changed into sweetness and become the first fruits of new life. Death does not have the last word!

This Easter, we cannot forget the many signs of death and life in places of war, violence, abuse, inequality, hunger, and the cries of our common home, Creation.

There are so many ways in which the Paschal Mystery is expressed in the world! Let us learn to recognise them as arising from Him who is *“the First and the Last, who was dead and came to life”* (Rev 2:8). Such a contemplative gaze will help us not to remain paralysed in the face of evil, but instead to join with many others in building resurrected life!

It is with these thoughts, dear brothers and sisters, that I wish you to celebrate the Paschal Mystery, *“grounded and steadfast in the faith, unshakable in the hope of the Gospel”* (Col 1:23), which is our profession of life.

Let us stay close to those who are afflicted by the wounds of these times, including some among ourselves. Let us stay close to the peoples of the Holy Land in this painful hour, as well as people in Ukraine and so many other places.

We believe that in them the Spirit of the Lord allows shoots of new life to develop in ways that we cannot imagine.

With fraternal greetings and the Blessing of St Francis.

Your brother and servant,



Fr. Massimo Fusarelli, ofm

Br Massimo Fusarelli, ofm
Minister General

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