



Archdiocese of Southwark

The Solemnity of Easter, 2020 - A Message from the Archbishop

Christus Resurrexit! Christ is Risen!

Dear friends, on this holy night, the greatest feast of the Christian year begins with a new flame. Bringing light out of darkness, the new flame of the Paschal Candle is a symbol of Christ's resurrection. It casts its radiance upon us to remind us that in baptism we have risen with Christ. Our baptism certificate is a page from His saving life story. We share and reflect His glory. Our hearts and minds are bright with His Spirit. From the darkest tomb, God kindles a fire, a new flame, a new hope, that will never go out.

Just two nights ago, we recalled another flame, from a charcoal fire burning outside the High Priest's palace. While the Lord Jesus was interrogated inside, Peter sat close by this fire, warming himself in the cold of the night. As the light caught his face it made Peter identifiable; first to a maid, then to stranger, and lastly to a servant. Each thought they recognised him: *Wasn't he in the garden with Him? Wasn't he one of His disciples? Surely he was with Him?* It was a fire of denial. As the cock crew, how scorching that flame must have been for Peter, the truth too hot to handle.

But there was another fire, the first Easter bonfire, a flame of mercy and love, of forgiveness and friendship. It was lit by the Lord Jesus on the shoreline by the Sea of Tiberias. The disciples were out fishing when, slowly, they recognised the Lord. Coming close, and climbing out of their boats, they met the Risen Jesus. He had prepared their breakfast: bread and fish, by now a familiar menu. It was beside that reconciling fire, in the light of a new day, that Peter heard again the invitation to *'Follow me.'* It was a fire of life and joy.

The flame of our Paschal Candle stands in direct continuity with those first Easter fires. In its light we proclaim that the Lord Jesus died *'once for all, to sin'* so that, we too, might consider ourselves *'dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ.'* (Rom 6:10-

11) As stubble is burnt away to rejuvenate the crop, so the fire of resurrection revitalises the Church. It re-commissions us for missionary discipleship: *Why look for someone who is alive among the dead? The Lord Jesus has risen as he said.* Easter is not a day, it is a way of life; it is a way to life.

This Easter we remember especially in our prayers our world and our country as we face the Covid 19 pandemic. We continue to hold in our prayers all those suffering from the virus, together with their families. We pray for those who have died, and those who mourn them. Easter faith brings us the hope that we shall see again those who have died and gone before us. We also continue to keep in prayer our National Health Service and Emergency Service staff, all our carers and key workers, our local and national government, and everyone working to keep our country and the services we need up and running. What amazing generosity of spirit we are witnessing from so many people.

For the next fifty days the new light of Easter will burn vividly in the paschal candle, the *pillar of fire* which banishes the darkness and glows to the honour of our God. This candle has no purpose but to spend itself for the glory of the Risen Christ. Like our bodies, it is marked with the cross, with the signs of beginning and of ending. Its dating reflects our lifespan. Its studs connect Christ's wounds with ours and the incense within them signifies his prayerful offering to the Father to which we are united in worship and praise. The flame is the living fire of Jesus' love, burning inextinguishably within us - *Christ yesterday and today, the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega, all time belongs to him, to him be glory and power.* If you can, light a candle this Easter Sunday as you pray, and each day of this coming Easter week. We are, individually and together, the paschal candle. The whole purpose of our existence it to be ablaze in Christ Jesus, risen and alive.

To you, your families, and your loved ones, every blessing for Easter in the joy of Christ's resurrection. Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia.

✠ John Wilson
Archbishop of Southwark