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## EASTER: A TIME FOR JOY!

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Just as the Jewish Passover was the greatest feast among the people of Israel, so is Easter the greatest of all Christian feasts for the disciples of Jesus. The [French] word "Pâques" [from which our English word "Paschal" comes] is derived from a word meaning 'passing over.' The Jewish people 'passed over' from Egypt into the Promised Land, and Jesus ('passed over') from death to life, and through Baptism, we too pass over from death to Life, with Jesus. That is the reason why Easter is the greatest of all feasts; it is so great that every Sunday we make memory of the Easter event.

### « HAVE YOU MADE YOUR EASTER DUTY? »

One of the questions that parents and priests of yesteryear used to ask was « Have you made your Easter duty, this year? » For some, the question could have implied having received absolution for one's sins and having received communion at least once during the allotted time; for others, the question could have been a query whether one had taken the Lenten season seriously, that one had truly "converted" oneself and was in a state of deep relationship with the God of Jesus, that the forty days had truly been beneficial. If Lent allows one to enter deeply into one's spiritual life and grow in faith and hope and in greater love for one's neighbour, it is also a time for real rejoicing: one is about to celebrate a very special Easter Sunday; thanks to God, you are going through the great passages of your life.

### A 'PASCHAL' SPIRITUALITY

The Lenten liturgy put us in touch with the people of God in many of its most meaningful passages. God's people really went through a lot of changes, super-changes! So much so that for forty years they did not stop their criticism of Moses and even God Himself. I greatly admire the Moses of Scripture, who at the age of 80 led his people out of Egypt. And this was no honeymoon! As soon as the people had left the land of slavery they started to regret the fleshpots and onions they had left behind, and others soon got bored with the manna and quail which the Lord provided them each day. Everything was cause for recrimination, and Moses would then stand before God as advocate for his people: « Your glory is at stake: do not abandon them! » Throughout these long years God was forging His people's endurance, through daily passages and changes, for the Great Passage they would soon undergo, the total gift of themselves to the God who had saved these nomads and who had led them to gradually discover the greatness of the Covenant which He had made with them.

### « MY BODY GIVEN UP. MY BLOOD Poured OUT »

With Jesus, Easter is a still greater "passage." It was during the traditional supper that Jesus took the bread and gave it to his friends, saying: « *Take and eat, this is my body given up for you.* » He then took the cup filled with wine and gave it to his disciples and said: « *Take this all of you and drink from it, for this is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant, - it will be shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven. Do this in memory of me.* » Jesus passes over from this world to his Father by giving his life for all humankind. Extraordinary passage! And with him we too, pass over from this world to our Father. The greatest change has

just happened on this earth. God has reconciled the world to himself in His Son Jesus. He has changed the human heart into something divine.

### EXTRAORDINARY EASTER!

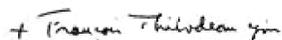
It is now a new heaven and a new earth that Jesus spreads before us. Let me quote from a hymn that is sung at the Liturgy of the Hours, during the Easter season: « *This is the day of the Resurrection. Let us rejoice and be glad! [Let us] welcome one another with a holy kiss. And to those who hate us, let us say "brother!" Let us forgive everything because of the Resurrection, and let us sing 'Christ is risen from the dead! Through death he has destroyed death itself. It is Easter, the Easter of the Lord! Christ our God leads us from death to life, from the earth to heaven, and we proclaim his victory . A sacred Easter has been given to us, a new and holy Easter, a mystical Easter, the purest Easter, the Easter of Christ, our Saviour, the immaculate and grandiose Easter, Easter that brings holiness to the faithful, that opens Paradise to all.'* »

Through all these special ways of describing Easter we feel that, at Easter, there is truly something special that has happened and is still happening.

### 1997 HOLY WEEK

May the coming hours be for us all unforgettable holy days. On Holy Thursday, may we discover or rediscover that love which led Jesus to institute the Eucharist and the Priesthood and to give us to give us the Great Commandment of Love. « *It is by the love that you have for one another that others will know you as my disciples.* » And Jesus prayed at length for all his disciples to dwell in unity. On Good Friday, let us join with our suffering sisters and brothers as we consider the great Love that led Jesus to give his life for me and for you as well as for all peoples of all times. The crosses of our lives take on an altogether different meaning. On Holy Saturday, at the Easter Vigil may we rediscover the Love of God which is from age to age, from creation time until today and tomorrow, and may we deepen the great mystery of our faith: Jesus, dead and Risen. And on Easter Sunday, may we join with our Christian brothers and sisters throughout the world to welcome the Resurrection of Jesus, the Saviour of the world. During these Holy Days I ask the Lord to fill you and yours with his choicest blessings. Following the example set before us in the Easter Water which several among you draw, on early Easter Sunday morning, may we also draw from the living waters of our faith.

Happy Easter! Alleluia!



+ François Thibodeau

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