



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP
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Dearly beloved sons and daughters of God:

St. Paul says, “Son though he was, Jesus learned obedience through what he suffered.” In another place St. Paul says, “Though he was in the form of God, Jesus did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at. He emptied himself and took the form of a slave. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient even unto death. Therefore God highly exalted him.”

The holy prophet Isaiah foretold this kind of love and said its presence would hail the arrival of the Messiah, the Anointed One of God who would free us, at last, from our exile, our oppression and our own failed attempts to find “the good life.”

More and more in our lifetime, our hoped-for “good life” of peaceful contentment has, instead, become a battleground and struggle for power to get ahead or even to rule society. Voices are raised, threats are leveled, fingers are pointed in blame of others and in the midst of this oppressive atmosphere death, in many forms, stalks the soul of our society. Interior rage erupts in violent acts of protest or revenge. Interior turmoil at times brings one to resort to the mistreatment of others for the sake of personal pleasure or gain. What has become of us? Is this how it will end?

Each year at Easter I stand before two paintings of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ; one is of Jesus abandoning the place of burial and stepping forward into the light of a new day, a glorious reflection of God’s desire for each one of us, but captured by artists as the vindication of God’s beloved Son’s humility. There is another painting, the Icon of the Resurrection, also called, *The Harrowing of Hell*. In it, Jesus is revealed in glory and surrounded by an aura that denotes his deity. He stands on two iron doors that have been torn from their hinges and beneath them, out of the darkness, Satan is being crushed by the weight of his oppressive “doors” as Jesus rescues Adam and Eve, and with them, all who longed for God’s truth to lead them away from their fallen state to find their true purpose and worth; their true selves as God’s unforgotten and deeply loved sons and daughters.

It is this Icon of *The Harrowing of Hell* that is most apt at this time in our society. Only by identifying with Jesus as St. Paul had spoken of him and Isaiah foretold him can we experience liberation from evil’s oppressive grasp and step into a new day that reflects God’s living desire for each one of us. Only through the two natures of Jesus, fully human and fully divine, can we as “only human” as we like to say, find the way out from the darkness and begin to live again now, and at last, stand before the awesome judgment seat of Christ and hear the words, “Well done, good and faithful servant. Come into the Kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world.”

Blessed Easter! Blessed be God in his Angels and in His Saints and in His Only Begotten Son! Alleluia!

Faithfully yours in Christ,

+Most Reverend Peter Libasci, D.D.
Tenth Roman Catholic Bishop of Manchester