

«Then they [the two disciples of Emmaus] told their story of what had happened on the road and how they had recognised him at the breaking of bread. They were still talking about all this when he himself stood among them and said to them: "Peace be with you!"» (Luke 24, 35-36)

Christ lives! He is our peace.

Dear Confreres,

The Lord is risen, alleluia, alleluia!
And may his peace and joy be with you all.

The resurrection of Jesus proclaims in a surprising way that life is stronger than death, that light has conquered darkness, that love has triumphed over evil, and that, even amid pain and sadness, the seeds of hope and peace germinate in this world torn apart by wars.

The Easter experience of Jesus' disciples was troubled, but also full of peace and joy, and that experience still resonates deeply today in our hearts as Comboni missionaries, whatever the environment in which we find ourselves. We are missionary disciples of the risen Lord in the midst of many situations in which it is necessary to sow reconciliation and peace as the only way towards true life.

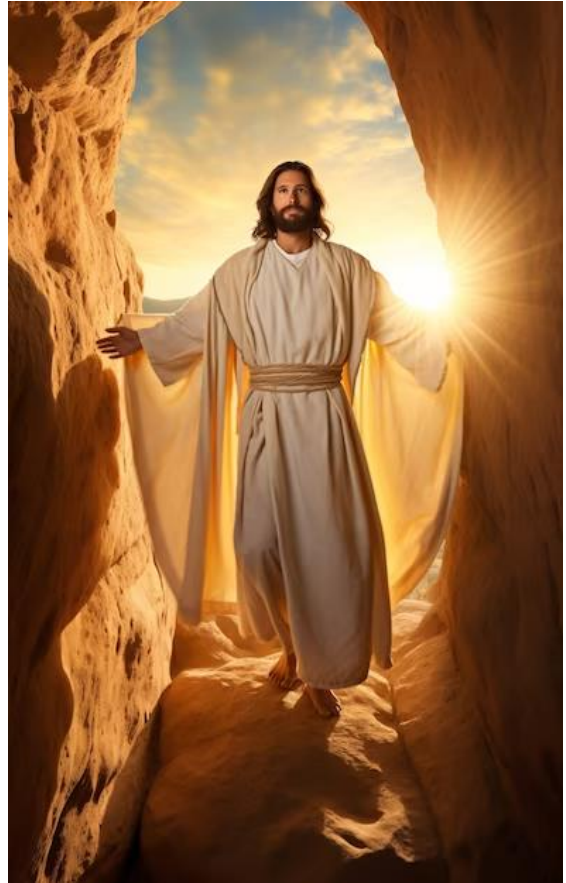
Twenty centuries after the Resurrection of Jesus, we believe it is more urgent than ever to place the joyful proclamation at the centre of our mission: "Christ lives! And in his light, there is peace for all!" This announcement arises from a profound conviction that finds its source in our faith, but is also the fruit of a personal experience lived in the encounter with the risen Lord along the paths of the mission, where he never fails to visit us, even in situations in which we feel a sense of discouragement, fear, uncertainty and even helplessness.

But it is in similar situations that he comes to us and says: "Peace be with you!" And his peace penetrates and renews our hearts, reviving our faith in the certainty that we are never alone. He promised us: "Behold, I am with you always, until the end of the world" (*Matthew 28, 20b*).

In this world of ours, torn apart by senseless wars, causing heartbreaking amounts of suffering, with the deaths of thousands of innocent victims and the survival of many others put at risk, those who are called to raise their voices may fall into apathy, or even end up getting used to this 'embarrassing normality' of endless violence and death. Others, again, might feel almost dragged even further into the darkness of the 'tomb', where death persists.

But we should remember that it is precisely in the midst of violence, death and despair that, "on the first day of the week" (*Luke 24, 1a*), a new creation, an eternal Easter of joy and peace, began. The stone has been 'rolled away' and the tomb is empty, for there is nothing that can stop Love from flowing forth as an infinite source of life for all.

The victory of Easter morning, however, is not yet complete. Many, too many continue to live as if they did not know that death was defeated by Christ and has become the passage from this world to the Father. Many, too many still await the grace of meeting the Risen Jesus, as a fresh breeze of a reconciled creation.



As true proclaimers of the living Jesus, we are called to remember Easter and experience the passage from slavery, injustice, and death to the freedom of a new life in the one who knew how to open every tomb.

The resurrection of Jesus is the victory of the salvific plan of the Father, who sent his son into the world to save us from the slavery of sin, from death and from all the forces that still destroy life and erase peace.

Together with the cry of suffering humanity, we cannot fail to listen to the cry of our planet Earth, violated by the supremacy of economic interests that mock that co-responsibility which alone can guarantee authentic human life.

As we celebrate this coming Easter, let us make the words of Saint Paul our own: “We were indeed buried with him into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life” (*Romans* 6,4).

The welling up of ‘new life’ within us becomes the strength to carry forward the mission received. First, this ‘full life’ manifests itself in our hearts, so that we can renew our commitment of love towards everyone every day. Then it reaches our feet, so that we set out towards others, following ‘paths of solidarity’ to meet those most in need, breaking down the walls of hatred and indifference. And then it passes into our hands, so that they learn ‘true charity’ and know how to embrace and welcome others, to share with them what we are and what we have.

This mission must be lived in the certainty that Jesus wants to rise again in every situation of death that we find along the paths of life, firmly believing that only love “to the end” (*John* 13:1 – “to the highest degree”), given without reservation as Jesus did, succeeds in renewing relationships between people, opening horizons of hope and peace.

We say we believe that nothing can stop God's work! But do we really believe this? Saint Isaac of Nineveh (or Isaac the Syrian), one of the greatest spiritual authors of all time, wrote: “The greatest sin is not to believe in the power of the Resurrection”. And Pope Francis echoes him: “There are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter” (*Evangelii gaudium*, 6).

This true. But we must, instead, let ourselves be amazed by so many of our brothers, together with many other priests, religious and lay people, who truly live that radical trust that was present in Saint Daniel Comboni, convinced like our Founder that “God never abandons the one who trusts in Him. He is the protector of innocence and vindicator of righteousness. I am happy in the cross, which, when borne willingly out of love for God, gives birth to victory and eternal life” (*Writings*, 7246).

Together, then, let us thank the Lord for all those who refuse to remain in the ‘tomb’ of selfishness, passivity, and indifference, and embrace with determination the urgent mission of being credible witnesses of the resurrection of Christ, embodying in every situation the style of God, who is “closeness, compassion and tenderness” (Pope Francis, 18th June 2022, speaking to the Comboni chapter members).

We wish to express our solidarity with the populations living in conflict situations, or victims of humanitarian and environmental tragedies, particularly in the countries where we are present.

We must have the courage to challenge death with the strength of God, proclaiming, with our lives, that he is truly alive in us, and is our peace!

The Lord is risen! Alleluia, Alleluia!

The General Council