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# *God's grace and human hope*

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Message from the Superior General of the Missionary Society of Saint Paul

Easter 2017

*16<sup>th</sup> April, 2017*

Dear MSSP brothers and sisters,

I am sure that all of us occasionally find ourselves in situations where things go the wrong direction. I do not mean the small day to day things that we easily forget about and move on, but essential realities in our lives that mark us and make us doubt what we believe. Sometimes it is a question of physical or mental health that suddenly puts us, or those dear to us, facing a brick wall with all the uncertainties that sickness brings with it. Sometimes they are the broken relationships with people close to us where the prospect of mending our communication gets bleaker with time. Sometimes it can also be related to our faith journey where irrespective of the many resolutions and fresh starts we make, we keep on finding ourselves in the same place, stuck and fighting our shortsighted compromises.

Yet despite of all this, we people of decent faith keep on hoping and praying that all will work out and God will help us. He will perform the miracle. Sometimes we take courage and dare to challenge God by asking him whether what we hope for is bigger than what his grace can attain. What I mean is that most of the time we are convinced that what we ask of Him is a good thing and that the world will be a better place if He performs the miracle the way we see it and as soon as possible. Yet there is silence, or things get worst, to add insult to injury, making our aching soul wonder deeper whether it's worth praying.

We are not alone in this situation. The disciples of Emmaus had this lonely walk away from Jerusalem wondering whether they have wasted three years of their lives. The apostles themselves tried to pick back their fishing trade because this appearing and disappearing of the risen Jesus was not bearing much fruit. And there is Mary Magdalene in front of the empty tomb. Mary loved Jesus dearly, and the sequence of violent events of the last days in Jerusalem took away all she

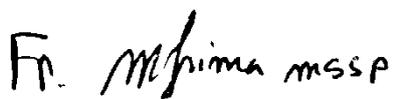
hoped for. Maybe her last hope was to have a sacred tomb, undisturbed and quiet, where she could come and reminisce her love for her master. Like us she could have hoped for a simple good thing with no harm done for having it. Yet her holy space was violated, the stone removed and the body taken.

And here we see Jesus asking Mary, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?” In other words, what are you hoping for? Mary wants a corpse, at least a distant reminder of things past and of comforts imagined. But the risen Christ calls her by name, that is, takes possession of her and brings her to his side. Mary started on the wrong side of the tomb. Jesus who entered that tomb by the front entrance as a dead body, was risen from a different exit; into the Kingdom. It was not a Lazarus thing, same life again for some more time. The stone was not rolled out for him so that he can come out, but for us to enter in, see that the tomb is empty and by pronouncing our name he calls us into his kingdom from a different entry. It’s the entrance into the Kingdom and not the tomb.

This Easter story speaks a lot to our human hopes and God’s graces. It shows us that God’s graces cannot be compared in quantity because they are of a different quality. We are constantly given the grace of becoming Easter people, those on the other side of the tomb, where we can see and experience life from a different perspective. Maybe we have personally experienced the inexplicable peace even in the death of somebody dear. Maybe we have grown stronger in faith and maturity despite unresolved hurts and an unjust story. Maybe we still find a hidden strength to keep loving somebody who is unresponsive or alienated. This is God’s grace that does not answer directly our mere human hopes or resolve pragmatically our problems, but give us higher gifts that make us Easter people, pointing towards the other side of the tomb.

I wish each one of you to live this Easter season as missionaries of God’s grace, that despite the violence, the self-centeredness and the pain of the world around us, we dare to offer a different kind of hope to those with whom we travel.

Blessings to all our communities and families.



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Superior General