

Pastoral Easter Message, 21 April 2019

My Dear Friends in Christ,

As I write this, the death toll from the devastating terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday has risen to almost three hundred, with the total number of casualties now estimated at over five hundred. Coordinated bomb blasts in three churches and two hotels in different parts of the country have been attributed to a local Islamist militant group with ties to international terrorist organizations. The breadth and sophistication of the attacks have prompted authorities to look for evidence of outside assistance. In the meantime, the island nation (which has been only slowly recovering from a twenty-six-year civil war) mourns its dead and seeks to comfort the injured and their families—while the rest of the world, once again, asks Why?

It will, of course, be observed (and no doubt coldly exploited) that on the holiest day in the Christian calendar such savage attacks on worshippers celebrating the Lord's Resurrection should be carried out by those who presume to believe a different faith. I say 'presume to believe' because the atrocities they have committed find no ethical justification by either the religion or the God they pretend to invoke. Indeed, all true religious thought from across the ages have placed ultimate value on the sanctity of human life and the dignity of all human beings. It is only those who have ignored or perverted the divine message contained in these tenets (be they Islamic jihadists or Christian white supremacists) who have sown such death and suffering as witnessed now in Sri Lanka.

As Christians we believe in a Savior who forgave his enemies (even as he hung upon their cross), and one who ate with sinners and healed those not of his race or religious heritage. We believe, moreover, in a Lord who declared that "not everyone who says 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of my Father" (Matthew 7:21)—which means to me that there are many righteous souls who may not share my faith but who may nonetheless enjoy God's full favor! So even the Resurrection is not the exclusive 'property' of Christian believers but is a universal transcendent reality that God has gifted to all the world (whether the world wishes to receive it or not). "Let the whole wide earth rejoice," invites a familiar Easter hymn"; Death is conquered, man is free. / Christ has won the victory."

As we rejoice in that victory, then, let us ever live out the love by which that victory was won—God's intimate, unconditional, consuming love for all creation. As we mourn with our brothers and sisters in Sri Lanka, and with grieving people of every nation, let each of us also find a way of conferring God's love on someone of another faith or race or cultural background. Whether by word or gesture or financial assistance, by membership in a group promoting interfaith dialogue, by political action, by a visit to a mosque or a synagogue, or by just a smile in the grocery store to someone who doesn't look or speak or dress like us, we will be bearing the fruits of Christ's Resurrection into the world Christ came to save. We will be rising with him in the glory he came to reveal.

Many Blessings—and a very Happy, Holy Eastertide!
Fr. Gordon +