

# The EASTER

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At the time of writing this reflection, I'm still in Lent and preparing for the celebration of Easter or the Easter season. The Easter season runs from Easter Sunday up to and including Pentecost Sunday and is introduced by Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday and Pentecost Sunday belong together as one comprehensive celebration of the central event of our salvation. Each of these days highlights a special dimension of the core message of our Christian faith, namely the revelation of God's love in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

When we speak of God's love, we are not so much referring to a special feeling in God such as "God loves you." - that is also true - but speaking of God's love first of all means indicating God's gift of himself to humankind, regardless of the human response. God does not just give us his blessing now and then, nor does he sometimes answer our prayers. More than that: in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, He gives Himself. That means, in all life's circumstances God is in solidarity with us. He is always available to us whenever we call upon Him. He remains faithful to us even when we are unfaithful to him. We express this by saying that God's self-giving to us is unconditional. We may also say, that God's heart always remains open to us, even when we close our hearts to God's love.

A clear expression of God's unconditional self-giving we see in the love of parents for their children. Good parents remain available to their children, even if the latter follow a path in life that causes grief to the parents. And when on their wedding day couples promise each other fidelity "till death do us part", they are performing a sacrament, a clear human sign of God's unconditional self-giving and fidelity.

During the Easter season we celebrate that God, in the person of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, gives himself to us and wants to be in lasting solidarity with us. On Maundy Thursday, at the climax of the Last Supper, Jesus says "*This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me*" (Luke 22:19). Thus, he reveals the meaning of his death on the cross when, on Good Friday he gives himself to the Father, saying, "*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit*" (Luke 23: 46), while sacrificing himself in solidarity with us, vulnerable human beings. The words, spoken at the Last Supper, "*Do this in remembrance of me,*" urge us to do the same, so that our life and death too may become a gift of our self to the Father and to one another.

On Easter Sunday, we celebrate that God accepts Jesus' self-gift by raising him from the dead and welcoming him into the love community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. According to John's gospel, on Easter Sunday, Jesus gives himself to all of us by sharing the Holy Spirit with us, represented by his disciples: "*Receive the Holy Spirit,*" (John 20:22). By allowing us to share in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, Jesus welcomes us also in the community of love of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that inexhaustible source of love, spreading love throughout the world and among all generations.

On Pentecost Sunday we celebrate that God gives himself to us through the Holy Spirit. On this day the Holy Spirit is poured out in our hearts. We are enriched by the gifts of "*love, joy and peace, patience, kindness and goodness, faith, gentleness and self-*

*control"* (Galatians 5: 22-23). These gifts of the Holy Spirit empowered Jesus to be totally available to those who needed him. Even now as the risen Lord, living in our midst, he keeps guiding and strengthening us through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The same gifts empower us to be always available: parents to their children, couples to each other, caregivers to those entrusted to their care, all of us to our loved ones, but also to the stranger who comes our way.

Easter time is a time of joy and thanksgiving, because God the Father has enriched our lives with the gift of himself, the love of his Heart through the Heart of Jesus Christ and the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit. Even during the world-wide COVID19 pandemic that is now striking us, the Holy Spirit is at work in each of us, so that we may remain faithful to our vocation as married or unmarried persons and be available to those around us, who need our presence or our help. I wish you all a joyful and blessed Easter season.