

Where is Easter hope for Egypt's terrorized Christians?

"Without a doubt, the survivors and those who escaped will gather again on Easter Sunday to celebrate the resurrection, which is the greatest source of hope for them." Palm Sunday this year was not decked with green spring foliage representing



Christ's triumphal journey into Jerusalem to meet his glory and tragedy. Instead, in Egypt, it was colored by the blood of dozens of Coptic martyrs in Tanta and Alexandria, slaughtered in the madness of two ISIS "kamikazes". It was an indiscriminate but efficient massacre, the result of methodical planning, executed by savages hidden away in their retreats in the Sinai, in northern Syria, or in the ruins of Iraq, near Mosul.

There were dozens of mutilated bodies; women, children, elderly people, who had come to the church to seek refuge from their day-to-day worries in these troubled times.

But instead, they were greeted by assassins intent on bringing an end to their modest lives. They will not see the Paschal season through and have been deprived of the resurrection and joy of Easter Sunday. What is there left for hope in the wake of such an event, a tragedy that could so easily inspire vengeful thoughts in those confronted with such evil that God has allowed to be committed against his own? What fragment of joy is there to be found in this infernal scene of dereliction? "Why have you abandoned us?"

This is the kind of question you hear, here on earth. We are sometimes left to wonder if it isn't simply a rough draft of what the great creator intended. Where can hope be found? In the same way, as we imagine a place for the human spirit, our sense of taste, or emotion, what place is there for hope? When the world outside makes us despair, hope has only one refuge, and that is inside us. It resides in the intimate relationship that we have with life, beyond hardship and pain. It must be close to the place where human will resides, for they seem so closely entwined. What other territory is there for hope without a determined will to believe in the future?

Without the determination of hope, the present would be nothing but a graveyard of aspirations and desires. The future is always before us. We are likely to hear this again from the great Pope Francis when he visits the Copts in three weeks' time. For centuries, the Copts have been our "separate brothers" but with whom we should demonstrate brotherly solidarity at all times.

We should cry alongside them, our tears for their blood. It is true that Coptic sites are not always the most appealing to our rich and privileged eyes. Their churches seem rudimentary and look as though

they might fall down in the wind. Their songs sound harsh and their ceremonies appear gaudy and interminable.

They don't hesitate to make noise in church, always coming and going throughout their ceremonies. Their cultural language is foreign to us. However, they are adept at finding joy in what seems to us to be great chaos. When you leave church, you are surrounded by their beaming smiles. These Copts are poor and humble, yet they are targeted by Islamist fanatics armed with Kalashnikovs. They know that the authorities are incapable of protecting them, even if they wanted to. It would run the risk of angering the Muslim Brotherhood, the Egypt-based fraternity behind so many atrocities. Without a doubt, the survivors and those who escaped will gather again on Easter Sunday to celebrate the resurrection, which is the greatest source of hope for them.

There will be more chances and beginnings in their lives, future horizons when the sun will rise in the east and gradually fill the place that darkness now holds. They will sing their exotic chants, their hymns to the Virgin once again and their will to live into the future, which has never yet been beaten, will bear them forward. If hope is will, it is also repetition and re-enacting the same rituals, uttering the same aspirations and the same words and prayers.

In the East, amid cold-blooded massacres perpetrated by groups from all over the world, the powerful safe in their combat airplanes, each day still dawns afresh. There are still new lives, new smiles and new children born. Men and women still love one another and create new projects.

The hardship of reality is often shattering, but the feeling of fatalism, stronger in the East than the West, is the twin of hope. It encourages us that believing is part of living a good life. Are we to dissuade these simple believers, whose hope is fused into their souls? Are we to instill panic in response to their lives on earth in these devastating times?

Who would have it in their hearts to deny them the joy of Easter? These minority Christians are surely tempted to flee their native land to seek refuge and shelter, should our borders be open to them. It would take a seriously hard soul to tell them that they are wrong to believe in human happiness and that the Devil's work is just as visible here as it is there.

To turn away and pretend that they would be no safer from harm here than in their country would not be in the spirit of brotherhood. Hope is not only about will and faith, but also human solidarity. One can not hope alone. Friendship, a hand held out, a smile, open arms rather than closed fists and demonstrations of clear joy from our part will give those suffering dark times in the East new reasons to believe and hope in the spirit of Easter. Easter brings the eternal promise of resurrection and the reconciliation of every person with his or her brothers and sisters.

Those who have been massacred, those who have disappeared, those grieving and the deceased all reach out to one another across earthly boundaries to illuminate our common path. In homage to the victims of terrorism, small candles are placed among the flowers on the ground. From Paris to Nice, St Petersburg to Stockholm, Berlin to Istanbul and London to Alexandria, these little candles flicker in red and white holders. They embody the trembling strength of hope, despite all that has been endured.

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