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“Why do you seek the living One among the dead? He is not here, but he has been raised.” (Lk 24:5,6)

To all the clergy, seminarians and faithful of the Diocese of Arizona: peace, joy and our apostolic blessing.

With these words the angels at Jesus’ tomb greeted the women who followed the Lord on that first Easter morning nearly two thousand years ago. One can only imagine the range of emotions that passed through the women as they behold the empty tomb and heard the angels’ strange and mystifying message. What could it mean? Had someone taken the Lord’s body and hidden it or was it possible that Christ had indeed been raised from the dead and restored to life by His heavenly Father/Mother?

That same question, “what does this message mean?”, continues to be asked today as well. Scholars and theologians debate the meaning of the empty tomb, trying to make sense out of something that doesn’t make sense easily to our logical minds. As Christians, followers of the Way of the Christ, the meaning of the message is clear. Death no longer has a hold on us. Death is an empty threat, bark without bite, sound and fury signifying nothing. There is nothing to fear. The death of which I speak is not just the death of the physical body but also the spiritual death that passes for life in our daily existence. Life in Christ, to live as Christ lived, is to be born again into new life, raised from the death of ordinary consciousness, with its attachment to the illusions of the world, to a new consciousness of limitless possibility, limitless growth.

Jesus’ life and death show us clearly that this new way of being is attainable in the here and now of our daily lives. It is not something that must be deferred until we leave our physical bodies and move on to some other realm of existence. Rather, it is something we can experience in our present life, provided we die to the false self formed from and by the images of the world and embrace the Resurrected Christ dwelling at the center of our being. This is, admittedly, a scary proposition and we may well agonize over the choices we must make, just as Jesus agonized in the Garden of Gethsemane. The world may scourge us and vilify us for not buying into

its deeply held and cherished illusions. Ultimately if we follow the Way of the Christ faithfully, we will be crucified and die to the world. But in that process, painful though it may be, there is the sure promise of Resurrection and new life in the expanded consciousness of the Resurrected Christ. Jesus' example assures us that success is possible.

This new life in Christ has both a personal and a social dimension; it is not just about us and our individual growth. Resurrection consciousness calls us to see the presence of Christ in all people and in all things. It challenges us to confront those systems that perpetuate injustice and imprison people in poverty, disease and want. It challenges us to work for justice and for the advancement of right relationship, sharing and mutual respect. It affirms the inherent dignity of all created beings and asks us to expose the moral bankruptcy of any system, be it political, social or religious, that treats anyone as less than the very son or daughter of our loving Mother/Father. Resurrection consciousness is not about feeling smug that we've been redeemed by the death of Christ. Resurrection consciousness is rather an opportunity—and perhaps even an obligation--to become more actively involved in the ongoing process of the redemption of the world.

As we once again celebrate the resurrection of our brother and Way shower, Jesus the Christ, I pray that his consciousness may be strengthened in you and that you will take courage from his example and join him more consciously in the work of establishing the realm of God on earth. And, I ask for your prayers that this same consciousness may be strengthened in me as well, that I too may more consciously contribute to the establishment of God's realm.

With sincere wishes for a joyous and blessed Easter, I remain,

Your brother in Christ,

**+Mark Elliott Newman, OC
Bishop—Diocese of Arizona**