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2019 EASTER MESSAGE

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Christ is risen; he is truly risen! Alleluia!!

The passion, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus are, without question, the most important events recorded in all of human history. Everything before those days was leading up to them, and everything since is imbued with the opportunity to live the grace they have brought to us, namely, the grace of having a personal relationship with the Risen Lord Jesus – a relationship that changes everything!

The life of Jesus and the meaning of his passion, death and resurrection has impacted and changed the lives of countless people since these events occurred nearly 2,000 years ago and they continue to change the lives of more people each year. This year at the Great Vigil of Easter, we, as a diocesan family, will welcome new members who are reborn through the waters of Baptism. We will celebrate with even more individuals who will be brought into full communion with the Church and those who will complete their initiation in the Catholic faith through the reception of the sacraments of Confirmation and first Holy Communion. These are wonderful celebrations for our local Church and a sign of new life. Throughout the Church, many thousands of new members have heard the Lord's call to become his disciples, to repent of their former ways of living, and to embrace the life of faith and promise of salvation offered to us by the risen Lord.

For those of us who were baptized as infants, and also for those among us who may, at times, question their commitment to Christ, or who may have fallen away from the practice of our Catholic faith, we may ask, how does that happen? How is it that people in this day and age choose to become part of the Church, despite all of the apparent obstacles: the sinfulness and imperfection of its members, failures in leadership, or the skepticism and challenges of modern society? The answer is simple: they have each had a profound encounter with the Risen Lord. They have heard him call them by name, they have responded to that call, and in these months of learning about the Lord, the Gospel, and the teachings of his Church, they have fallen in love with him!

In his first encyclical after being elected Pope, entitled *Deus Caritas Est* (*God is Love*), our Holy Father Emeritus, Pope Benedict XVI, wrote about this phenomenon. He states in the opening paragraph: "Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice, or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction." Our Catholic faith, at most fundamental, is about a relationship, a relationship between each of us and the Lord! Jesus did not need to suffer, he chose it because of his great love for us. Why? When we are in love, we do things that seem crazy to everyone else. Being Christian therefore, is about accepting the love of Jesus and loving him in return – loving him enough to re-order our lives and our priorities according to the model he gave us, to follow the way of life he teaches us through his Gospel and the Church, and to serve others, especially the poor and outcast.

Dear brothers and sisters, this is the power of the Resurrection, the power of true, pure and perfect love; love that can even change the greatest act of hatred into the cause of our salvation. When did you first encounter and fall in love with the Lord? What can we do to rekindle the fire of that love, or to love him more fully? As we gather together in our parishes and with our families on Easter morning, may we each give thanks to God for the amazing love he has showered upon us through the Lord Jesus. May we allow the power of his love to transform us anew, that we may become authentic reflections of his self-sacrificing love in our world today as members of his body, the Church. A blessed Easter to you and your loved ones! Christ is risen; he is truly risen! Alleluia!!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Bishop of Norwich