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***Alleluia! Christ is Risen!
He is Risen, indeed! Alleluia!***



AS the Christian world began Holy Week this year all eyes turned to the City of Paris watching the great gothic Cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris in flames. The fire engulfed the 850 year old structure built not only of wood and stone but of faith and determination. People from countries around the world, from across France, and from the city of lights itself, held vigil; praying that Our Lady of Paris would preserve the holy site dedicated to her, the Mother of our Lord. Those who came together in prayer transcended social and economic classes. Old and young stood together. People of faith, and those of no faith, were drawn to Notre Dame de Paris. Some in tears, some in disbelief, some in fear for what it all meant. Yet even amidst the flames and devastation, there was faith; there was hope; there was charity.

People awoke on the Tuesday morning to see that the great Cathedral was still standing. At the far end still stood the Cross of Christ in gleaming gold high above the Altar. The west door remained intact, the two bell towers standing, the rose windows still in place. In a heroic act of bravery and faith in the midst of the flames, the Chaplain of the Paris Fire Brigade, Father Jean-Marc Fournier, led a human chain in saving the holy relics within: a piece of the true Cross, the Crown of Thorns, the mantle of King St. Louis; and most important of all, the Blessed Sacrament. Though the wooden beamed roof is gone; the 19th century steeple fallen, the floor of the nave covered in chards and ashes, that which is at the very heart of Notre Dame de Paris remains intact – the Christian Faith which built her.

A secular society – France – recognized that the soul of the nation was not to be found in fragments, protest, or politics, but in the Christian Faith upon which the nation had been built. Holy Week had become just that – not only for those who always believed but for those who had somehow, somewhere along their way forgotten Faith. Those who had taken the sacred for granted, along with the building which stood at the very heart of Paris – a monument not to the past but to the living future, to faith in Christ crucified and risen. Presidents and Kings, billionaires and entrepreneurs, the rich and famous, the faithful and people of good will, all stepped forward to pledge renewal and restoration, offering talent and treasure for Notre Dame de Paris, Our Lady of Paris.

For the disciples of Christ that first Holy Week in Jerusalem, the events which transpired brought grief, shock, fear, and sorrow. Jesus had told them that the Temple would be destroyed but in three days it would rise again. He had said, “And when I am lifted up, I will draw all men unto me.” From the shock and horror of the Crucifixion came the glory and joy of the Resurrection. From the grave of death came the empty tomb – life everlasting. At the Cross, Our Lady became Our Mother; and we, her children. The wood of the Cross, the crown of thorns, the Precious Blood from the side of Christ, these would be our salvation.

The events of Holy Week, then and now, transform our lives in ways we cannot always understand or predict. Things forgotten become real again; outward and visible signs become once more inward and spiritual grace. From the chards and ashes of our life, Christ fashions new life filled with hope and faith. We are reminded once more that love is stronger than death, faith greater than doubt, hope able to overcome fear. It is Holy Week, and the Cross of Christ still shines forth, even amidst the rubble, smoke and debris of fallen humanity. “Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us; therefore, let us keep the Feast.”

May I extend to you all my blessings and prayers for Holy Week and a most joyous Eastertide.

+Shane