

JANUARY – MARCH
2024



Stella Maris

SUPPORTING SEAFARERS AND FISHERS AROUND THE WORLD

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Stella Maris is the largest ship visiting network in the world, working in 332 ports with 227 port chaplains around the world. We also run 53 seafarers' centres all over the world.

We are only able to continue our work through the generous donations of our supporters and volunteers.

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Stella Maris provides seafarers with practical support, information and a listening ear



NAPLES, ITALY

Naples is the third largest city in Italy and is one of the country's most ancient ports, founded by the Greeks in the sixth century BC. The Bay of Naples is considered one of the most beautiful in the world with dramatic views of the active volcano Mount Vesuvius. The Stella Maris mission is a story that began in Scotland in 1922 and continues in the port of Naples and around the world with a great commitment of volunteers and religious people to assist sailors of all nationalities and faiths.

Four Stella Maris missions are active in Campania: Naples, Salerno, Ischia and Torre del Greco. The one in Naples, the *Cappellina* or "little chapel", is led by Don Sabatino Perna, together with the Deacon Eugenio Capezzuto and Giovanni Santilli, president of the association.

Don Sabatino Perna is a young parish priest from Ercolano, chaplain of Stella Maris for about six years, chosen by the Bishop of Naples partly for his maritime background: for twelve years he was a chaplain on cruise ships. Every Sunday, at 8.30, he celebrates Mass in the chapel under the Maritime Terminal.

But the work is human before it is religious. The association was born and lives to offer material and spiritual help and solidarity to men who travel the world on ships, often away from home and loved ones for months and months. For this reason, every time they go ashore they can find a listening ear in the volunteers and priests who in Naples, as in Genoa, Trieste and in many other Italian and world port cities, occupy spaces dedicated to them.

The activity, as Don Sabatino Perna and the Deacon Eugenio Capezzuto explain, can be divided into two moments: the welcome on land at the association's headquarters, and that on board ship where sometimes

Mass is celebrated or, more often, the chaplains simply talk to the crew and ask if there's anything they need.

"I must admit" – explains Don Sabatino Perna – "that, in other ports, there is greater attention towards us and above all towards the mission to which we are dedicated. In the port of Naples there is a certain difficulty in conveying the idea that hospitality is a value to be supported. The Diocese of Naples supports us. In recent years we have equipped our space with PCs, printers and TVs also to more easily come into contact with ships and their crew, but bureaucracy often hinders our commitment. I am referring to the possibility of getting on board and the countless permits required."

In the meantime, as Eugenio Capezzuto underlines, the association continues to be a point of reference for sailors of any nationality and religion. "Ours" – he says – "is an ancient history that was born in Scotland and has spread throughout the world. Today there are three hundred ports in the world where Stella Maris is located. Our strength is given, not only by the activity we carry out, but also by the network we have created between all the associations and with whom we share commitment, initiatives, and with whom we periodically meet."

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THE CHURCH YEAR AT SEA



2ND JANUARY

SAINTS BASIL THE GREAT AND GREGORY NAZIANZEN, BISHOPS AND DOCTORS OF THE CHURCH

St Basil (c.330-379) was born into a saintly family in Caesarea, Cappadocia (Turkey); his brother was St Gregory of Nyssa, also a notable theologian. For some years St Basil lived in a monastic community before becoming Bishop of Caesarea in 370. He was a keen defender of the reality of the Incarnation against attacks from Arian heretics. St Basil also gave his name to a Liturgy and a set of monastic rules which are still used in the East.

St Gregory Nazianzen (330-390), a friend of St Basil, was also from Cappadocia and involved in countering the Arian heresy. In 381 he became Bishop of Constantinople, although he had to retire to his native Nazianzus due to opposition. He was called 'The Theologian' because of his great learning and talent for oratory.

20TH JANUARY

SAINT SEBASTIAN, MARTYR

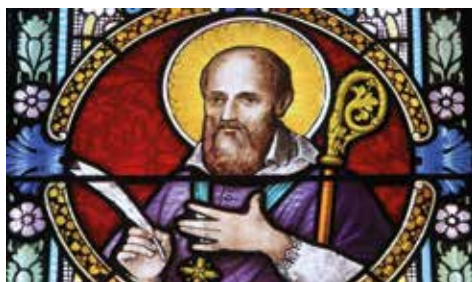
St Sebastian (+ c.300) came from Milan and, according to legend, was an officer in Diocletian's imperial guard. After becoming a Christian, he suffered martyrdom in Rome and his tomb on the Via Appia was soon visited by pilgrims. He is often shown in art transfixed with arrows and is a patron of doctors and policemen.



24TH JANUARY

SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES, BISHOP AND DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

St Francis de Sales (1567-1622) was born in Thorens, Savoy (France) and trained as a lawyer before being ordained. He became Bishop of Geneva in 1602 and did much to combat Calvinism. He also founded the Order of the Visitation, with St Jane Frances de Chantal, and produced popular spiritual works such as *Introduction to the Devout Life*. His flock called him 'the Gentle Christ of Geneva'. Pius XI declared St Francis patron of journalists and writers in 1923.



8TH FEBRUARY**SAINT JOSEPHINE BAKHITA, VIRGIN**

St Josephine Bakhita (c.1868-1947) was born in the Darfur region of the Sudan and spent much of her early life as a slave. She eventually settled in Italy, where she converted to Christianity and entered the Canossian Daughters of Charity at Schio, near Vicenza. Serving quietly as the community's portress, cook and sacristan, she gained a reputation for exceptional piety and holiness.

**10TH FEBRUARY****SAINT SCHOLASTICA, VIRGIN**

St Scholastica (+ c.543) was the sister of St Benedict. She followed the rule of her brother near Montecassino and is regarded as the first Benedictine nun. When she met her brother for the last time, a sudden rainstorm providentially prolonged the meeting; three days later St Benedict saw her soul ascend to heaven as a dove (her symbol in art).



14TH FEBRUARY

ASH WEDNESDAY

“For our sake he made him to be sin who did not know sin,” states the epistle for Ash Wednesday, “so that we might become the righteousness of God in him” (2 Co 5:21). The perfect Son, who is God, willingly became man and entered the fallen world so that sinful men and women might become children of God. This divine paradox echoes the remarkable words of Jesus: “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it” (Lk 9:22-25).

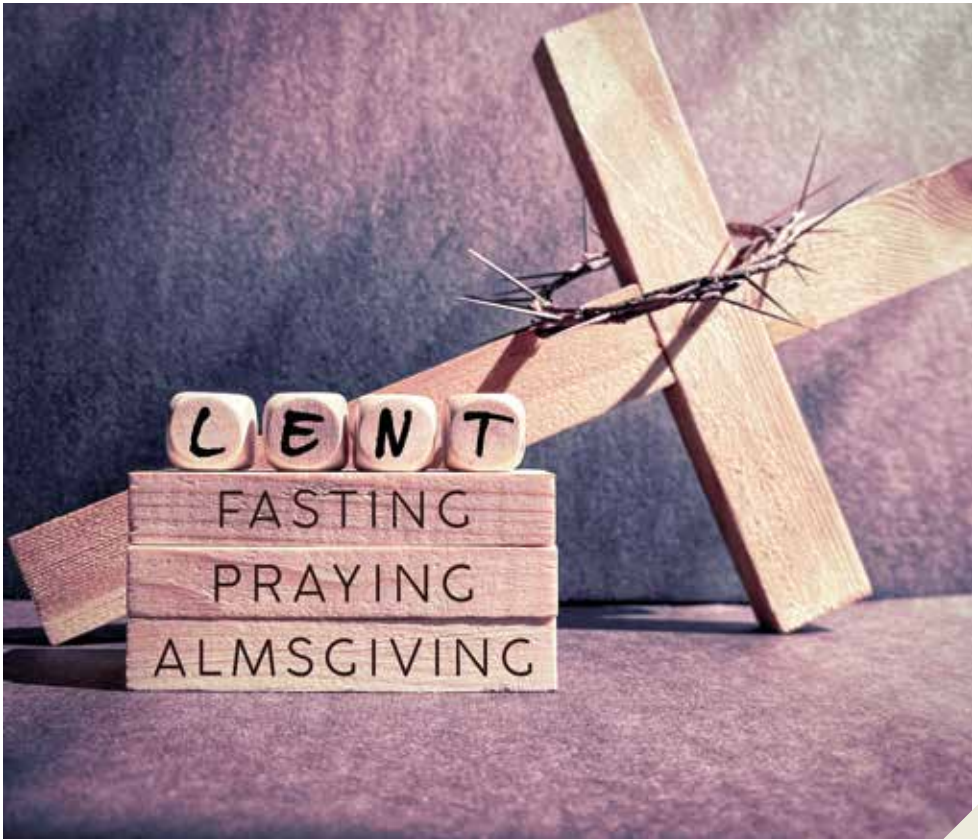
Lent is a season for seeing the world through the eyes of Christ, which means many of our assumptions will be challenged or even turned upside down. Prayer is essential for this new way of seeing what is really and truly living what we see in Christ.

In the Gospel for Ash Wednesday, from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus condemns those who give alms in order to gain attention, who pointedly appear gloomy while fasting to appear pious, and who pray in public in a way meant to garner praise. “But when you pray,” Jesus said, “go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you” (Mt 6:6).

After all, the call to follow Jesus is not meant for those who think they are already saved and spiritually whole. It is for those who desire to be truly alive and awake. Giving up food can sharpen this holy desire. “Fasting wakes us up,” said Pope Francis in his 2018 Lenten message. “It makes us more attentive to God and our neighbour. It revives our desire to obey God who alone is capable of satisfying our hunger.”

Prayer

O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of sloth, despair, lust for power, and idle talk; give me in their place the spirit of chastity, humility, patience, and love for thy servant. Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to see my own transgressions, and not to judge my brother, for blessed art thou, unto ages of ages. Amen. (Lenten Prayer of St Ephrem)



LENT

Lent is a paradoxical season. On the one hand, the word itself names something joyful: *lencten* in Old English means “springtime”, because the days begin to lengthen. The dead of winter is behind us, and the grass will begin to show through the snow cover any day. On the other hand, Lent is a season of asceticism. The word *askesis* originally meant the kind of training or discipline that an athlete underwent. Then it was applied to spiritual self-discipline for the sake of training one’s prayer life. One lifts weights at the gym to gain strength in the arm; Lenten asceticism is doing spiritual reps. It is the discipline

required to become an icon of Christ, and make his image visible on our faces. The whole aim of the Lenten asceticism is to refresh our spiritual conformity to Christ. Time and time again Israel’s prophets spoke about the need to go back into the desert where Moses had led Israel’s ancestors. This was a land between Egypt (which they had just left) and the Promised Land (to which they were still on their way). In this in-between-place Israel remembered God, relied only on God, listened more carefully to God. They were there for forty years. We are in Lent for forty days.

8TH MARCH

SAINT JOHN OF GOD, RELIGIOUS

St John of God (1495-1550) was born at Montemor-o-Novo (Portugal) and took a number of employments, including shepherd, soldier and bookseller. Encouraged by St John of Avila, he experienced a conversion of heart aged forty-two and started serving the sick in Granada (Spain). For this purpose, he founded the Brothers Hospitallers (Brothers of St John of God) and is venerated as patron of the sick and of hospitals, and also of booksellers.

19TH MARCH

SAINT JOSEPH, SPOUSE OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Not a single word of his is recorded in Sacred Scripture and yet St Joseph is one of the greatest and most popular saints, largely because of his humility and his closeness to Our Lord. He died before the beginning of Jesus's public ministry and, since he probably died in the presence of Jesus and Mary, is venerated as the patron of a good death. Blessed Pius IX named him patron of the universal church.



23RD MARCH

SAINT TURIBIUS OF MONGROVEJO, BISHOP

St Turibius of Mongrovejo (1538-1606) was born at Mayorga (Spain) and worked for many years as Professor of Law at Salamanca. In 1580, even though he was a layman, he was appointed archbishop of Lima (Peru), where, after being ordained, he did much to consolidate ecclesiastical discipline and champion the rights of indigenous peoples.

31ST MARCH

EASTER SUNDAY

“Today, throughout the world, the Church’s proclamation resounds: ‘Jesus, who was crucified, has risen as he said. Alleluia!’ The crucified Jesus, none other, has risen from the dead. God the Father raised Jesus, his Son, because he fully accomplished his saving will. Jesus took upon himself our weakness, our infirmities, even our death. He endured our sufferings and bore the weight of our sins. Because of this, God the Father exalted him and now Jesus Christ lives forever; he is the Lord. The witnesses report an important detail: the risen Jesus bears the marks of the wounds in his hands, feet and side. These wounds are the everlasting seal of his love for us. All those who experience a painful trial in body or spirit can find refuge in these wounds and, through them, receive the grace of the hope that does not disappoint.” – Pope Francis

Lectio Divina – a short introduction

How to link up with Jesus and with God if you can’t get to Mass? Read the Word of God in scripture. It is like a letter from home, written specially for you – and God is writing to you. Perhaps light a candle to show God’s presence.

Take a short passage, perhaps the Sunday gospel. Put yourself in the presence of God, open yourself to God, for God is all around you.

What is God writing to you about? What is Jesus saying to you? Imagine the scene. You are one of the disciples, listening and watching. Ask Jesus what he means for you.

Read the passage again, until it enters your heart. It may help to do this with others, to share with them and learn from them what Jesus is saying to them. Always end with a blessing, a sign of real friendship for your brothers and sisters and a prayer for each one’s needs.

January 2024 A New Start: John the Baptist

SCRIPTURE

Gospel Reading In those days, John the Baptist came, proclaiming in the desert of Judaea, saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven has drawn near.' This was the man spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said:

A voice of one crying in the desert, 'Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight.'

Then Jerusalem and all Judaea and the whole region around the Jordan district kept going out to him, and they were baptised by him in the River Jordan as they confessed their sins.



REFLECTION

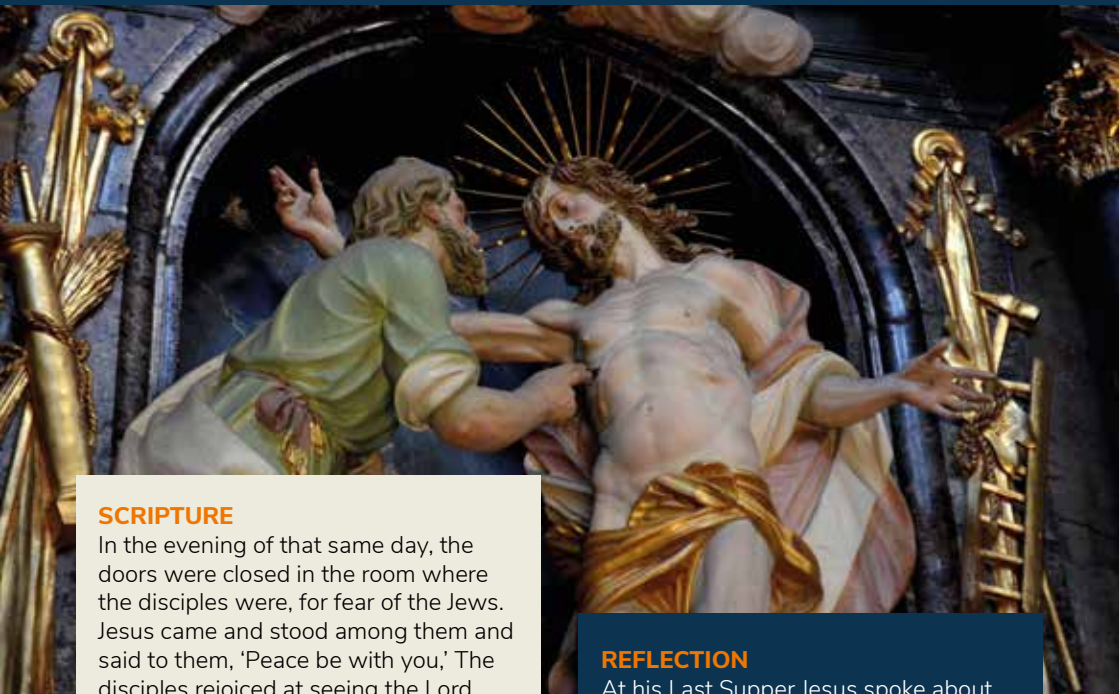
The beginning of the year is a good moment to restart our life. John the Baptist, the last of the Old Testament prophets, went down to the ford of the River Jordan, where all the merchants would be passing between East and West with their goods (and back again with other cargoes). He challenged them whether sales and profits were the most important values in life. This was the moment when Jesus began spreading the gospel. He saw and experienced the Spirit of God come down upon him, and the Father saying 'This is my Beloved Son'.

We are all the beloved sons and daughters of the Father. The start of a new calendar year might be the moment to ask ourselves about the values in our own lives. Start again and ask what is really valuable to you. What are the most important values in your life? Pay? Honesty? Promotion? Family? Friendship? Comfort? Reputation?

If we truly believe that God created us, that he looks after our every moment, that his Son Jesus Christ redeemed us from the blackness of evil and continues to inspire all our good actions, then we must view all these real and important human values through that lens. At the start of a new calendar year it is valuable to ask ourselves whether we really are Christians in our values and choices in life.

March 2024

Jesus gives his Spirit



SCRIPTURE

In the evening of that same day, the doors were closed in the room where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' The disciples rejoiced at seeing the Lord, and he said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so am I sending you.' After saying this he breathed on them and said: 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven.'

Eight days later the disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were closed, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here, and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.' Thomas replied, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him: Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

REFLECTION

At his Last Supper Jesus spoke about his gift of the Spirit which would lead his disciples into all truth and would make him present among us to guide us into all truth. On Easter Sunday he came to them and breathed upon them his Spirit. This made his Spirit permanently present in his Church, not only in his priests but in all the members of his Church, giving us strength, courage and wisdom. The Spirit binds us together and gives us all Christ's strength and comfort. The Spirit also gives the Church that wonderful power of forgiveness. This makes it possible for us to start again when we have failed him. We always know that he is with us to guide us, a light even on the darkest of dark days.



Holy Heroes

The Ulma Family

By P Finaldi

➤ The Ordinary Holiness of a Family who became Heroes.

The Blessed Ulma family died as heroes, having lost their lives due to hiding Jews from the Nazis, guided by their Christian faith in doing so. But prior to this tragic event, they lived unremarkable lives in a quiet Polish village. "We can discover how how it was the ordinary holiness of the Ulmas that ultimately led to their heroic deeds and eventual martyrdom.

Jozef Ulma was born in 1900 – he was a man of varied interests and deep faith – a farmer, photographer, librarian, cultivator of trees and silkworms and active in the rich cultural and religious life of the small town of Markowa in South Eastern Poland. He met his wife Wiktoria while they were both taking part in a theatrical production and their marriage was brief but fruitful. Wiktoria was a well educated woman and an active Catholic – together with her husband they continued their firm

commitment to community organisations and Catholic associations such as the Association of the Living Rosary.

They were married in 1935 and began their married life in ordinary domestic happiness – praying, working hard and bringing up their rapidly growing family. Jozef's sympathetic eye as a photographer lyrically documents everyday life in his home and in the village – the great powers of Europe and their aggressive ambitions seemed far away, yet by the time Wiktoria was expecting their fourth child in 1939, Poland had already been divided by its two rapacious neighbours. Markowa was just inside the area controlled by the Nazis and all too soon the anti-semitic laws of the Third Reich began to make themselves felt even in little Markowa. Between 1939 and 1942 the 120 Jewish residents of Markowa were slowly pressured either into fleeing or

moving to the ghetto in nearby Rzeszow. A number of Catholic families in Markowa decided to take their Jewish neighbours into their homes in an attempt to save them from the “final solution” – chief among these were the Ulmas who by 1942 had six children. They took in a total of eight Jews, six members of the Szall family and two sisters, Golda and Layka Goldman. These were hidden in the attic of the Ulmas’ farmhouse and helped the family in their work when possible.

The Ulmas’ heroism and generosity was inspired by their deep faith in Christ and his teachings. In the family bible which can still be seen in the Ulma Museum in Markowa, the page containing the parable of the good Samaritan is underlined. On the page next to Jesus’s great parable on helping the stranger is one word written by Jozef or Wiktoria – “tak” or “yes”. They must have known that their yes could eventually lead them to having to live out Jesus’s words in the Gospel, Greater love hath no man than to give up his life for his friend, yet they put their yes into practice.

The Ulmas succeeded in hiding their guests for almost two years until the 24th March 1944 when they were betrayed to the authorities probably by a certain Wlodomierz Les who had swindled the Szall family out of their property and was probably looking to protect himself as the Third Reich appeared

to be in its own death throes.

Eyewitness accounts of the massacre that took place are truly horrifying as the police raided the Ulma family home and forced its inhabitants out into the street. First the members of the Szall family and the Goldmans were shot. Jozef and Wiktoria who was eight months pregnant with their seventh child were then shot in front of their children. As she died she went into premature labour. Their screaming children were then also killed. In a matter of minutes seventeen people lay dead, Jews and Catholics side by side.

Justice came swiftly for Les who within the year was tried and executed by the Polish Home Army.

In 1995 the Ulmas were recognized by the Yad Vashem centre as righteous among the nations and in 2003 the cause for the Ulma family was opened in Przemysl.

In September 2023 in Markowa, Cardinal Semeraro on behalf of His Holiness Pope Francis conducted the ceremony officially to declare the whole family as Blessed including the partially born child who had received the baptism by blood of those killed in hatred of the faith. Cardinal Semeraro in his homily on Sunday said: “Without ever having uttered a word, today the little Blessed cries out to the modern world to welcome, love, and protect life, especially that of the defenceless and marginalised, from the moment of conception until natural death.”



Almighty God, we thank you for the testimony of the heroic love of the spouses, Jozef and Wiktoria with their children, who gave their lives to save persecuted Jews. May their prayers and example support families in Christian life and help everyone to follow the true path of holiness. Amen

A Meditation on the Crucifixion

➤ Every chapel of the Missionaries of Charity, that admirable religious congregation founded by St Teresa of Kolkata, has these words of Jesus, “I thirst”, inscribed next to the large crucifix that hangs behind the altar.



In 1946 St Teresa clearly heard Jesus telling her: “I thirst for you, for your love”; she understood that she and all those who would join her congregation were called to satisfy as much as they could the thirst of Jesus for their love. By walking this way of the cross today, by our prayers and tears as we follow the Lord in his passion, we can give to Jesus our love, and so become in that way little missionaries of charity, sent out in love to bring love to Christ. And we might remember that Christ, the suffering Christ, is found in the least, in the most vulnerable and needy, in the poorest of the poor all around us. Every day, and not only in Lent, we are sent out as missionaries of charity to satisfy their thirst, to give them the love we have received from God.

If we become missionaries of charity in this way, and we learn to pour out our lives in service of the poor, in care and love for those in need; if we seek Christ in those around us, then we can truly say with the Lord that “it is finished”. This is to say that Christ’s redeeming work has been accomplished.

For Christ has died in order that man might live, in order to give us a share in his divine life, and God is love. When we have been raised up from the deadliness of our sins, and revived by the power of Christ’s cross, then we shall love as Christ loves, alive in his Holy Spirit. Then we shall know that God’s saving work is being carried out in us; then the saving work he finished on the cross is having its desired effect in this world, for he is renewing his creation through divine love.

As we gaze upon the Crucified One now, let us kneel and pray that we will have the strength and courage and wisdom to

satisfy his thirst today; let us pray that the Spirit whom Christ has poured forth from the cross will make us receive new life, and become on fire with his love.

St John says: "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But if any one has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth" (1 Jn 3:16-18).

A MEDITATION ON THE RESURRECTION

Death cannot contain Life. As the Easter Sequence says, "Mors et vita duello", "Death and Life struggled in a wondrous war, the dead Lord of Life reigns and lives". Hence the closure of the tomb is cracked open, and the grave itself stands empty, but it resembles an open door. As the Preface of the Dead intones, "for your faithful, Lord, life is changed not ended", so thanks to the Risen Lord Jesus and in union with him, death becomes the gateway to eternal life.

Truly, henceforth, we need not be afraid, even in the face of death – not if we have faith in the resurrection and are united to Christ through love. The women who came to the empty tomb early on the first Easter morning were seeking Christ with hearts full of love. We who pray the Rosary can do likewise, seeking the Lord with loving attentive hearts. The invitation to come and see the place where he lay is an invitation to faith, to believe, to trust in God's Word. The women's hands gesturing towards this place are likewise inviting us to believe in the power of God to conquer sin, death, and all that would terrorise us. Fittingly, this mosaic image does not show Christ climbing out of the tomb, as so many later images of the Resurrection would do. Rather, it has the reticence of the Gospel. The Resurrection is not seen by human eyes but is based on the testimony of another. Thus are we invited to faith, to trust in the word of others, and above all in the Word of him who is called the "faithful and true Witness" (Rv 3:14).

By Fr Lawrence Lew OP



Stella Maris is the largest ship-visiting network in the world. We improve the lives of seafarers and fishers through our network of local chaplains and seafarer centres, expert information, advocacy and spiritual support.



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