



THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN JERUSALEM AND THE MIDDLE EAST
A PROVINCE OF THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION
DIOCESE OF CYPRUS AND THE GULF

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HOLY WEEK AND EASTER 2023: FROM ARCHBISHOP MICHAEL

Prayers, blessings, and love to the clergy and people of our Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf and to our many friends and supporters around the world as Holy Week, begun on Palm Sunday of the Passion, moves towards the great and solemn Easter Feast of the Resurrection.

In our highly variegated diocese the commemorations and celebrations are being played out in richly varied settings. But it's the same Mystery of Faith we're all acclaiming and proclaiming. Large and small churches and congregations, with worshippers born in all sorts of countries; rich, poor, and middling; the young and younger among us predominating in some places and the older in others; from the borders of Iran in the East to the Mediterranean in the west; in republics and monarchies; hemmed in by restrictions or free and untrammelled: we are those who affirm in church by week, but are invited most especially to feel and more deeply understand during this Great Week, that Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

I write from St George Baghdad, where as often as not over the past sixteen years Julia and I have joined the local church for these days. As I looked out in the Palm Sunday liturgy on the hundred and more worshippers I reflected as always that, here, it costs a lot to be in church. Though security in the city has changed for the better the situation is still militarized and checkpoints and barriers, let alone the chronic political standstill, remind everyone that normality is some way off. The economy may be a just little better than before but not so much as to have percolated to the largely poor and disadvantaged who make up the bulk of this congregation. Yet they come.

We come, partly out of habit (and habit is *good*) but surely at the profoundest level because Christ Jesus draws us to himself. The love of God was and is poured out in Christ on all Creation. In Christ's life, suffering, death, and resurrection is the world's salvation. Many just don't get it. Often we, despite our regular coming, lose the vision of it, the force of it, the revolutionary transformation of it. But Holy Week is *the* time to be put back in touch with the Mystery, and have it change us.

When Easter comes, after living and walking with Jesus through Holy Week, let's deeply assent to the great paschal hymn whose first and last verses are these:

The strife is o'er, the battle done;
Now is the victor's triumph won;
O let the song of praise be sung:
Alleluia!

Lord, by the stripes which wounded thee
From death's dread sting thy servants free,
That we may live, and sing to thee:
Alleluia!

+ Michael