

Rt Rev. Philip North, Easter message 2026

‘What stops you from despairing?’ The woman who recently asked me that question was part of a group of older people I was chatting to on a Parish visit. There were eight or nine of them and they were anxious.

They were worrying about the conflict in Iran and whether it would spiral out of control. They were concerned about the stalemate in Ukraine and what might happen next in an era of tough guy, testosterone-fuelled politics. They were fretting about the seemingly endless cost of living crisis and its impact on their families.

They had been worn down by the news and were anxious. Maybe that question is on your heart as we celebrate Easter against the backdrop of a turbulent world. What stops us from despairing?

So instead of giving a long, complex theological answer, I told that small group about a friend I have called Joseph who is a Bishop in South Sudan. His diocese is in a warzone. Two thirds of his people are displaced and living in refugee camps.

There is no functioning state apparatus, so the people turn to the church for a solution to every problem. In his homeland, the houses and schools and churches have been destroyed so his Diocesan vision is a plan for rebuilding a whole nation. He serves the poorest people on the planet. But there is never the merest hint of despair to Joseph.

All you ever hear from him is hope and joy and optimism for the future. And that hope is not self-generated in any way. He has hope because he believes in the Resurrection.

Today we celebrate the most extraordinary miracle. A corpse has come back to life. A battered, torn and wounded body, laid in a stone-cold tomb, has risen again. For those who accept that Jesus is risen, there can be no despair. Yes, there might be times of suffering and pain and self-doubt. Life may still at times be hard. But if you accept that Jesus is risen, there can never be despair.

Why not? Well, think about what has just happened. In Jesus God himself has been through just about the very worst that human experience can throw at him. He has been whipped and scourged and humiliated.

He has been abandoned by his friends and nailed up in the midday heat to die. He has cried out, ‘My God why have you forsaken me?’ As a result of human sin, he has given up his life in desperate agony. Jesus been to the very darkest pit of human despair.

And now he is alive again. He has been through all that torment and emerged victorious. And here is the amazing thing. You and I can share in his victory. For when we invite Jesus into our lives and receive baptism into his Church, his death becomes our death. His new life becomes our life. His triumph becomes our triumph.

Despair means you have given up hope. But because Jesus is risen there is always hope. Even in conflict, even in pain, even in uncertainty, even in grief, there is hope. Jesus has triumphed and so love has triumphed, and so all in the end will be glory.

You may be watching this short film because you are a committed Christian wanting to strengthen your faith. You may be an enquirer, wanting to explore and learn more about the Christian life. Or you may have no faith and be wondering what the fuss is all about.

Wherever you are with Jesus, this Easter in your heart, stare into the empty tomb. See the place where the body lay. And ask yourself – is this indeed Resurrection? For if Jesus is risen, our lives are

transformed. If Jesus is risen, we are saved by him for ever. If Jesus is risen, there can never be despair. There can only be glorious and irresistible hope.

Alleluia. Christ is Risen.

Rt Rev. Philip North, Bishop of Blackburn