

DEATH AND RESURRECTION

April is the month of Easter, but also Good Friday. We observe these holy feasts every year, but the real meaning of them does not set in until we are presented with the reality of our own mortality. I saw this with Marines in the Middle East, who flocked to Mass and Confession only when presented with the possibility of death in Operation Iraqi Freedom.



BY BISHOP MICHAEL C. BARBER, SJ

Bishop Michael C. Barber, SJ has been bishop of the Diocese of Oakland since May 2013.

In the past four days, I have attended three funerals. During one eulogy, the adult daughter of the deceased told how 50 years ago her family moved to Africa, where her father had volunteered as a "bush doctor" to provide medical care.

The little girl was outside playing with other kids and unknowingly grabbed the leaves of a red-hot pepper plant. The oil from the leaves got on her lips, and as she described it, "My whole mouth was on fire." Tears running

down her face, she went inside screaming for help.

Her father consulted the local people, who said there was no known remedy to counteract the inflammation caused by the red-hot pepper oil. Her father took her by the hand outside, went to the offending pepper plant, pulled off a leaf, put it in his mouth, and bit and chewed it. His whole face erupted in swollen inflammation, and with tears pouring from his eyes, he bent down to his daughter and said, "Well, Lidia, at least now you're not alone."

And so the Lord Jesus descended from heaven, became a man, allowed Himself to be arrested, scourged and crucified – so we would not be alone anymore in our own sufferings and death. Like Lidia's father, Jesus took on *more* pain than us. And took

us by the hand through the darkness and fear of death ... to lead us confidently to the joy of eternal life. Jesus' death has salvific value.

He saves us from our sins. And our suffering has meaning by participating in his suffering. As St. Paul says, "I make up in my body what is lacking the suffering of Our Lord Jesus Christ."

I think it helpful to remember this and our absolute need for Jesus as we approach the end of our earthly days. And take comfort in his promise of the life of the world to come. As we say in the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting." Amen.

Blessed Good Friday. And Happy Easter to you all! ●

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