



Vision and Viewpoint

Joan Chittister



A feast of dazzling light

“The true division of humanity,” Victor Hugo wrote in *Les Miserables*, “is between those who live in light and those who live in darkness.” Victor Hugo, it seems, understood Easter.

We love to think of Easter as the feast of dazzling light. We get up on Easter Sunday morning knowing that the sorrow of Good Friday is finally ended, that the pain of the cross has been compensated for by a burst of brilliant victory from the gates of the grave, that Jesus is vindicated, that the faith of the disciples is confirmed for all to see, and that everyone lived happily ever after. We love fairy tales. Unfortunately, Easter is not one of them.

On the contrary, Easter is raw reality. Easter stands in stark witness, not to the meaning of death, but to the meaning of what it is to go on despite death, in the face of death—because of death. To celebrate Easter means to stand in the light of the empty tomb and decide what to do next. Until we come to realize that, we stand to misread the meaning not simply of the Easter gospel but of our own lives. We miss the point. We make Easter an historical event rather than a life-changing commitment. We fail to realize that Easter demands as much of us now as it did of the apostles then.

Most of all we miss the very meaning of the Easters that we are dealing with in our own lives, in our own time.

Easter is the feast that gives meaning to life. It is the feast that never ends. After Easter, the tomb stands open for all of us to enter. If Jesus is risen, then you and I have no choice but to go into the tomb, put on the leftover garments ourselves, and follow Jesus back to Galilee where the poor cry for food and cripples cry to be taken to the pool and the blind wait for the spittle on their eyes to dry. All the fidelity in the world will not substitute for leaving the tomb and beginning the journey all over again. Today. Every day. Always.

That’s what Easter is really about. It is the “division of humanity” to which Hugo refers in his dramatic rendering of the struggle between light and dark. Yes, Easter is about dazzling light—but only if it shines through us.