
NEWSLETTER

OF THE COMMISSION FOR PROMOTING
RACIAL & CULTURAL INCLUSION

Lent & Easter

**Who was Simon
of Cyrene?
“Every African is
in some sense a
member of the
family of Simon
of Cyrene”**

Pope Benedict

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**CELEBRATING EASTER
AROUND THE WORLD**

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**FINDING DISMAS IN
BELMARSH PRISON**

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Welcome Friends to our Lent & Easter edition of the newsletter

At the beginning of Lent, Archbishop John, in his pastoral letter, compared the open arms of the baby Jesus to His open arms on the cross and saw those arms as an invitation from God-with-us – to us, and through us, to others. We are each, he says, without exception, called to be an extension of the Lord Jesus' reach to all people. His open arms welcome all. He goes on to ask how we might help others find their way into the loving fold of Christ's Church. The Lord Jesus reached out to the leper with compassion and healed him. How can we reach out to those who need to receive the healing power of faith and the transformative love of God? We hope you enjoy the reading our newsletter and we would love to hear from you. God bless, Carmel [Editor]

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Did you know, the cross on a hot cross bun represents the cross of Christ and the delicious aromatic aroma you can smell, when they come out of the oven, are to remind us of the spices used to anoint Christ's body for burial.

Who is Simon of Cyrene?

Simon of Cyrene is mentioned in the Gospel of Mark 15:21 who identifies him as "the father of Alexander and Rufus" and was a north African [Cyrene is now modern-day Libya in North Africa]. Tradition states that his sons became missionaries; the inclusion of their names could suggest they were of some importance in the early Christian community in Rome.

We know very little about Simon of Cyrene, aside from several passages in Scripture [Matt. 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26]. Although there is no mention of him being honoured as a saint, he is best known for helping Jesus to carry his cross to Calvary and so has earned his place in salvation history. But just because the Church hasn't formally recognized someone as a saint doesn't mean that person isn't in heaven and thus a saint – something for which we all strive, Simon also serves as a reminder that our lives are sometimes interrupted, our plans laughed at by God and all that we had mapped out for a day or a year can be turned on its head.

Imagine how he felt, as he walked along the Via Dolorosa, being accosted by a Roman soldier and forced to help a stumbling, exhausted and lacerated man carry his cross to his death. As much as he would have wanted to slip away unnoticed he didn't argue with the soldier, he did as he was ordered. Then somewhere along that holy route, Simon came to sense in Whose presence he was.

A nineteenth century Polish mystic named Wanda Malczewska saw a vision of Simon returning to Jerusalem after looking for a plot of land to rent. But as he helps Jesus carry his cross, Jesus' face affects him deeply: She writes:

“Christ looked upon him, and Simon understood that gaze — he immediately understood the mystery of the cross and fell in love with the Lord Jesus. ... I heard him tell the Lord Jesus: ‘Forgive me, Lord, for not having rushed ...at the first demand of the Jews, for I did not know you. [But seeing you suffer] I have come to the conviction that you are God hidden in human flesh. Your gaze confirmed my convictions, penetrating me to the depths of my being. It seemed to me that I could not carry your cross, which they put upon me, but I am now carrying [it] easily, because you, Lord, accompany me. Don't leave me. ...”

Compare this Simon to Simon Peter who looked away, who fled, who denied following or even knowing Jesus. Yet Jesus, ever forgiving of all our transgressions is love itself because he is God and God is love. Would we flee or would we stand?

What happened to Simon? Tradition says that he and his sons became faithful Christians.



CYRENE IS IN
PRESENT DAY LYBIA
LYING ON THE
NORTHERN MOST TIP
OF AFRICA

Pope Benedict said of Simon of Cyrene:

Can it not be said that every African is in some sense is a member of the family of Simon of Cyrene? Every African who suffers, indeed every person who suffers, helps Christ to carry his Cross and climbs with him the path to Golgotha in order one day to rise again with him. When we see the infamy to which Jesus was subjected, when we contemplate his face on the Cross, when we recognize his appalling suffering, we can glimpse, through faith, the radiant face of the Risen Lord who tells us that suffering and sickness will not have the last word in our human lives. I pray, dear brothers and sisters, that you will be able to recognize yourselves in “Simon of Cyrene”. I pray, dear brothers and sisters who are sick, that many of you will encounter a Simon at your bedside.

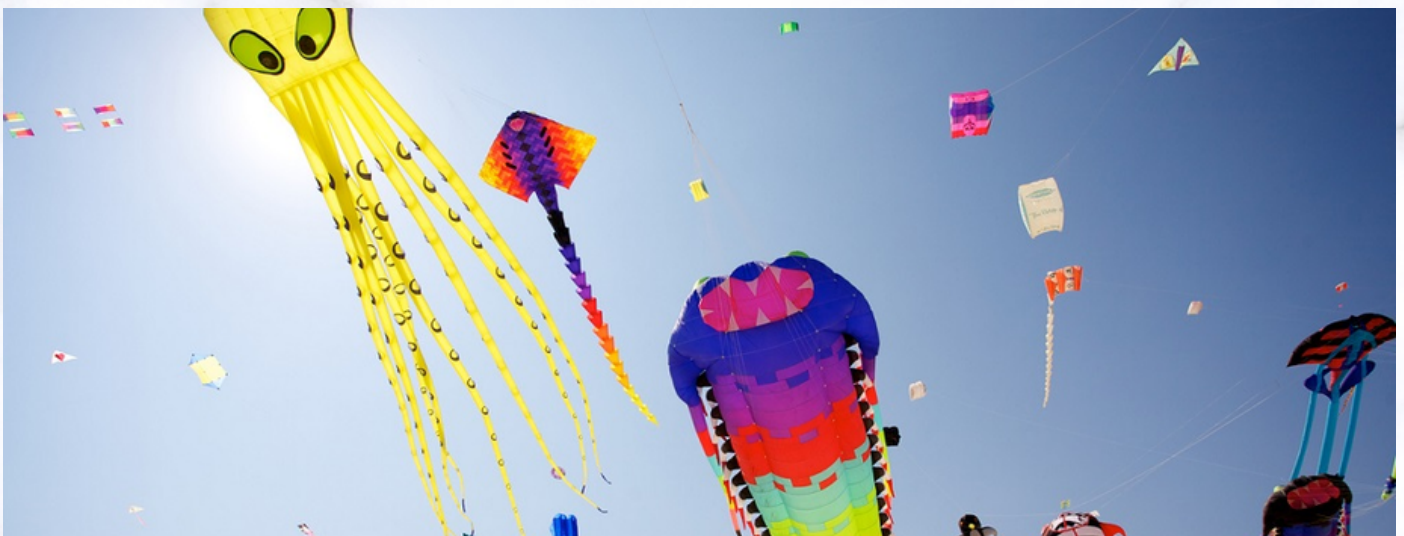
HE IS RISEN FROM THE DEAD AND HE IS LORD
BUT WOULD WE KNOW IT IN THE UK?



HOW DO OTHER CULTURES CELEBRATE EASTER SUNDAY?

Happy Easter! Jesus is not in the grave, He has been raised! Would we in the UK know this good news? How is it celebrated? In Catholic Churches, Lent and Holy Week, which culminates in the Easter Sunday celebrations, are solemnly and beautifully observed. However, step outside of the church and back into an increasingly secular society and the only thing to remind us that it's Easter are the shop shelves which groan under the weight of chocolate eggs, which appear with indecent haste, as soon as the Christmas decorations are taken down, making millions of pounds in commercial profit.

Besides going to Mass, what do we Christians actually do to celebrate Easter and show others that we are celebrating the death and glorious resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ? Let's take a look at what is practised in other countries...



Flying kites at Easter is a big tradition in the **Caribbean**. The kites symbolize Christ's resurrection, rising from the grave and upward into heaven. Bermuda and Guyana will create and fly their kites after a sunrise service, then enjoy hot baked buns.