

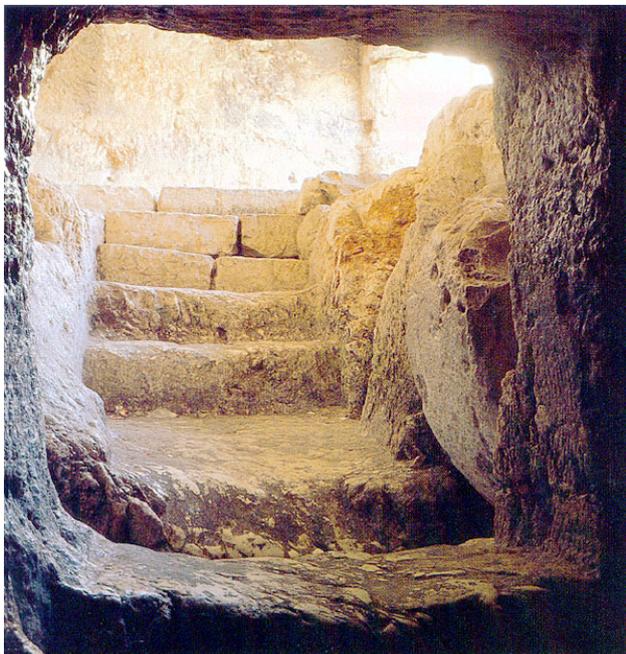
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*"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5, 16)*

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item 316

**"we are men and women of resurrection.."**



"It is an extraordinary grace to be gathered here in prayer...

"The empty tomb, that new garden grave where Joseph of Arimathea had reverently placed Jesus' body, is the place from which the proclamation of the resurrection begins. ...

"This proclamation, confirmed by the testimony of those to whom the risen Lord appeared, is the heart of the Christian message, faithfully passed down from generation to generation. ...

"This is the basis of the faith which unites us, whereby together we profess that Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of the Father and our sole Lord, 'suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead'. Each of us, everyone

baptised in Christ, has spiritually risen from this tomb, for in baptism all of us truly became members of the body of the One who is the Firstborn of all creation; we were buried together with him, so as to be raised up with him and to walk in newness of life.

"Let us receive the special grace of this moment. We pause in reverent silence before this empty tomb in order to rediscover the grandeur of our Christian vocation: we are men and women of resurrection, and not of death. From this place we learn how to live our lives, the trials of our Churches and of the whole world, in the light of Easter morning. ...

"Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the basis of our hope! Let us not deprive the world of the joyful message of the resurrection! And let us not be deaf to the powerful summons to unity which rings out from this very place, in the words of



the One who, risen from the dead, calls all of us 'my brothers'".

Pope Francis  
Jerusalem – ISRAEL  
26.05.14

item 317

## Sister Silvia – living out the message of Easter

A tiny, shy, soft-spoken woman dressed in plain clothing is making an enormous impact on the lives of the people of Aleppo, Syria. This past month, Sister Silvia (pseudonym) has pondered the implications of Easter, the resurrection of Christ, in this war-ravaged place. "Nowadays, sometimes people leave God and their faith because of poverty and the needs they have. I want to stand with them and protect them," she explains.

"In Aleppo, people go days, weeks and sometimes months without electricity and water. They have huge needs. I cannot go to them and just tell them 'God is love.' When people suffer and children are dying, you need to do something. I need to help in my little way. My fear is that Christian families will lose their feelings of value, especially the girls and women. When factories stopped working, hundreds of people ended up without work. And that means hundreds of families are affected. We visit families in Aleppo, and ask what they need."



On Easter and other feast days, **OpenDoors** partners with Sister Silvia as she provides clothing for the people in a way that grants them choice and dignity. "We decorate our place so that it looks like a beautiful mall. People can enjoy something to eat and drink. The children can come with their parents. They are able to make selections on needed items, and they try on clothes. It is really important that they have a choice; even poor people have the right to choose. By giving them a choice, we give them dignity."

Sister Silvia is involved in education for 900 children in Aleppo, and in providing practical help for needy families. Last Christmas, over 1,000 children received a new set of clothes through her outreaches. "For Easter 2014, our goal is to reach out to 1,300 children in Aleppo, but also in the cities of Damascus and Hasakah. We were afraid the Free Syrian Army or ISIS (a jihadist group called the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) would take the clothes while being transported, but fortunately, the clothes arrived safely."

"Through your [**OpenDoors**] help we put a smile on the children's faces," Sister Silvia says. "We give this help to Christian and Muslim families. Muslims come and say, 'we cannot believe Christians are doing this.' We often pray for them. We don't preach, but we try to live Christ. People have a lot of questions. Instead of hatred, we bring a message of love and forgiveness. They were touched by our help, that Christians are helping Muslims."

The distribution of clothes is also a good way to connect with families. "We talk to the mothers and hear their needs. This is really important. People who were well off in the past have nothing now. They feel shy about it. I know someone who had a shop worth millions. He lost everything, And it is really hard for them. We try to bring what they need in a quiet way, in order to preserve their dignity. For Arab people, it is very hard to show that they are in need. Someone told me, 'I was rich, and I used to give money to the church. And now the church is helping me?'. "



The emotional and psychological needs are equally overwhelming in this place, where the realities of war are a daily experience. "Our fear is that children are now being brought up with a fighting mentality. And when you constantly hear shooting and explosions, it creates psychological problems. We need to think more on how to provide trauma counselling and educate people in this field. It is a huge need - I often feel hopeless in front of violence. But this is the situation, and we need to deal with it. There is a fire within me that keeps me going. It's the love of God and His grace." In Christ, Sister Silvia remains optimistic. "The big cloud will go, and the sun will shine again. Will it take another few years? We don't know. What we know is that we cannot stop living and moving. The war will come to an end. And the real work will start when the war is over."

Father, through the life, death and resurrection of Christ, we have received new life and have become Your sons and daughters. Thank You for the testimony of Your daughter, Sister Silvia, who out of gratitude and with the new heart You have given her is ministering tirelessly in Aleppo, Syria. As she lives out the resurrection in the midst of war, protect her, Father, and continue to provide the resources to meet the needs You bring before her. Strengthen and encourage her when weariness engulfs her. Protect the children growing up in this war; that their hearts will remain tender toward Your Spirit and toward other people. Through the love and compassion of Sister Silvia and other Christians, we pray that the message of the gospel of Christ would penetrate the hearts of their Muslim neighbours, and bring about a revival in this place. In the name of Jesus, the God-man who died and rose again that we might live, Amen.

Ian  
OPENDOORS – USA  
21.04.14

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