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Letter of Rector of the Catholic University of Lublin for Easter 2025

Spiritual Resurrection To a New Life

The Solemnity of the Resurrection directs our thoughts to the distant past, when Christ left His tomb after death. It also transports us to an unknown future, as we all hope for eternal life. Easter, however, is not just a celebration of historical memories of Jesus defeating death two thousand years ago. Nor is it a vague dream of humanity's return to life. If we believe in the true resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and if we desire to overcome evil, death, and sin in ourselves by His power, we must now embark on a personal journey towards the final resurrection and daily spiritual rebirth. This journey will enable us to emerge from the grave of our failings, transformed and radiant with the goodness that comes from God himself.

In this Easter reflection, let us embrace the experience of those who have already walked this path. Starting in 2013, the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin has been involved in the social reintegration of persons deprived of liberty, serving their time in the Detention Centre in Lublin. As of 2022, under my auspices and with the support of the University's researchers and teachers, our Studies Centre offers education for prisoners in Lublin and in other correctional institutions across Poland. The project enables convicts to receive full-time education at Bachelor's and Master's levels; students majoring in Family Science acquire important ethical and humanistic values. Today, as many as 40 students, both men and women, benefit from the daily on-site classes at the correctional facility. A similar number have already graduated from the programme. Nearly 60 academics have taught courses with prisoners.

I have asked the students and the graduates who have finished serving their time in prison and returned to society to share their reflections on resurrection. I wanted these reflections to be based on their own experiences. Why them, specifically, and why this particular holiday? How many of

us treat those in correctional facilities as non-existent? Only too often, even the family members refer to their loved ones in prison as “dead, gone, or ghosts.”? Locked up in prisons, the prisoners themselves, our students, write to me: “May we never die in this life again”. Thus, all these prisoners must, in a way, rise from the dead before they can return to the bosom of society. That is why they, our students and graduates of the study programme in the correctional facility, are the actual authors of this letter. Their confessions provide a glimpse of the key aspects of spiritual resurrection. Let us listen to this voice, taking into account the words of Jesus from the Gospel according to Matthew: “I was in prison, and you came to see me” (Mt 25; 35-40).

1. Rebirth to a new life begins from recognising one’s own mistakes

Prisoners who have embraced the effort of learning stress that rebirth to a new life begins with a humble acknowledgement of the mistakes made. In doing so, they affirm a fundamental truth of the spiritual life, valid in Christianity but also known in ancient Greece: “conversion involves a greater understanding”. In this spirit, Roman, our former student from the Lublin Detention Centre, notes: “Renewed life is a journey that begins with recognising one’s mistakes and taking responsibility for one’s actions. It requires humility, courage and the belief that change is possible”.

All prisoners emphasise that being in detention gives them time to reflect and recognise their vulnerability. It is an opportunity to gain an awareness that they are sinners and that only God can liberate them from this state by offering them a new life. Paweł, still serving his prison sentence, describes this situation as follows: “God has a proposal for us but waits for our personal response – for our invitation”. In other words, resurrection from sin is God’s offer to everyone, yet it will be accepted only by those who wish to do so of their own free will.

2. You need to die to live – hardships as a chance to build a new life

Prisoners frequently refer to the situation that earned them their prison sentence as a state of death. At the same time, when they begin the process of conversion, or spiritual resurrection, they come to see this state as a happy fault that may trigger an inner transformation. Arek from the Detention Centre in Południowa St. in Lublin observes: “The stay in prison has stripped me of a part of my life, yet has proved a challenge and a chance for starting a new, more meaningful life. Reflection on the state of spiritual death has awoken my conscience and enabled me to find nobler feelings, a sense of dignity and common decency, to discover in myself a wealth of goodness, sensitivity and gentleness, and first of all love”. Summing up this testimony, we can say that you need to die to live or, to quote the words addressed by Jesus to Nicodemus, you need to be reborn for a better life (cf. Jn 3:3).

Another prisoner by the name of Grzegorz expressed a most profound truth in his testimony: “Resurrection is possible only through death, which we cannot afford. That is why Christ paid the

price for those, who call Him their only Lord, the Way, the Truth and the Life". These words demonstrate an awareness of the existence of two kinds of death. The sinner dies a spiritual death caused by evil, which should be avoided in life because it destroys our inherent goodness and love. Christ's sacrifice is the remedy for recovery from this kind of death. Only Christ as the Son of God could effectively die for us and rise again. He overcame our sinful death with His innocent death, resulting from His boundless love for humanity and culminating in a resurrection that transcends the laws of nature and is a gift to every human being.

3. Role of a good example and culture in moral resurrection

Our prisoner-students stress that their spiritual resurrection took place in the unique circumstances that facilitated the process. A tangible example from good people coming to their aid was the prerequisite for moral revival. This is how Łukasz describes the circumstances of his transformation: "As a student, I was greatly surprised by the approach of our lecturers. For them, we were students, not criminals. For the first time in my life, I was treated like a normal human being. It was the priest who showed me real life based on Christian morality. He didn't demand anything from me and didn't impose, but his attitude made me want to be good". This confession shows the importance of the role of the person who, following the example of Christ, shows acceptance and willingness to help someone in a state of spiritual death.

Prisoners highlight the role of culture in the transformation process. By reading poetry, for example, they see a different world. They come to understand their loneliness and inner void. Reading awakens their latent sensitivity, makes them work on themselves, and opens them up to helping others. High culture, i.e., literature, music, and the arts, is said to have a cleansing power; it gives food for thought, sensitises people, triggers their rebirth, and enables them to aspire to higher goals.

4. A Catholic university as a path to spiritual resurrection

In their testimonies, prisoners emphasise the importance of the study programme offered by the Catholic University of Lublin for their return to normal life. These are extremely eloquent testimonies, the best confirmation of the relevance of our University's teaching, educational, and social reintegration initiative. One of the women prisoners writes: "Thanks to my studies, I have met many valuable people, and I feel appreciated and needed. I feel that I am doing something important not only for myself. In time, when I successfully finish my studies and leave the detention centre, I will be able to work and support other people who need help. Now that I have risen from the dead, my will to live and to fight for myself and my life has been restored". Let us hear a similar witness: "As a student of the science of the family and marriage I started to understand Scripture, which I had seen as mere history before. During our studies, priests explained the entire biblical

story, and I started living by it. For me, this is resurrection as I try to live a good life and help others”.

The testimonies of the detainees in the Lublin detention centre presented here highlight some vital aspects of spiritual resurrection that can be instructive for every person, not just Christians. None of us is without flaws. We all need conversion and a gradual resurrection from our weaknesses. It is crucial that, like these prisoners, we become aware of this need to rise from the dead and to rise from sin. Let us remember that Christ did not come only to the healthy but also to the sick, he did not come only to the perfect but also to the flawed, he did not come only to the wealthy but above all to the poor. After all, Christ has come not only to the free, but also to prisoners. Christ has saved us no matter who or what we are. We need to humbly recognise before God our weaknesses and the fact that we need the power of Christ's resurrection. All the difficulties and sufferings we encounter daily provide an opportunity to rethink our behaviour and experience an inner transformation. Prison, too, is not just a place to serve a sentence, but a place intended for transformation. Other people can help those in prison and in our personal process of inner transformation. In turn, we can help others in their rise from the dead. Let us become beacons pointing the path towards resurrection.

Sharing as Rector of the Catholic University of Lublin the experience of work with a unique group of students-prisoners, I wish to encourage us all to engage in the daily resurrection from our weaknesses. I also ask you to support all the teaching and educational efforts carried out at our University. In our work we are faithful to the Christian tradition, but we also strive to be open to new challenges and social needs, exemplified by the launch of the Faculty of Medicine. With humility and faith, we entrust our University to God's protection and the prayers of the faithful. May the Risen Christ be seen by the faculty and students of the Catholic University of Lublin, and by our whole homeland, as a light that does not go out and gives hope for a new life, full of mutual love, kindness, forgiveness, and peace.

Rector, Catholic University of Lublin



Fr. Prof. Dr. Hab. Miroslaw Kalinowski

Lublin, Easter 2025