Columns
Spirituality



Pictures of a dry eucalyptus tree, left, and a green eucalyptus tree; during a walk through the forest Rosemary Wanyoike noticed dried up eucalyptus trees, which she says is very unusual. (Rosemary Wanyoike)



by Rosemary Wanyoike

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Recently, I took a walk through the forest. I had not gone through there in a long time. In Kenya, it has been very dry since the beginning of the year, with the grass all burned up by the scorching sun. Now something very unusual caught my attention. I saw some eucalyptus trees that had dried up, and others showed signs of drying up soon. I have never seen this before!

In my home area, this is the most feared tree, known for its long taproot that anchors it, and its deep root systems that enable it to absorb water and nutrients fast. This tree is said to be a heavy feeder needing a lot of water — it is nicknamed "the water taker." If it grows among crops, it takes away most of the water from the crops. And it is evergreen. So this sight worried me and I could hear a voice in me saying, "*If the eucalyptus can dry up, what else will remain*?"

This experience made me think about the days following the crucifixion of Jesus, before his appearance to his disciples after resurrection; the days preceding Easter. We read in the Scriptures that the disciples were behind closed doors for fear of the Jews (John 20:19). Like the eucalyptus that I saw, people around them probably looked up to them to draw hope, but their sadness would not have allowed them to be there for anyone.

Continuing my walk, I realized there have been some signs of rain and in some parts of the country — in particular where I live — we had received about three rain showers. At this, I concluded that with this kind of tree drying, the drought cannot go much beyond this; now it is time for the rains to fall; surely this is the beginning of the rainy season.

This experience spoke to me deeply about Easter and I realized that Easter is "the rain of our lives." It comes when we are almost giving up, and brings water to our drooping spirits. When the disciples were at their lowest point, the resurrected Jesus

appeared to them, gifting them with joy and breathing the Holy Spirit upon them. After that, all the sorrow was forgotten. They got new energy! Think of Mary Magdalene running to tell the brothers about the Resurrection.



(Unsplash/Reza Shayestehpour)

This inspiration made me think about life differently. As a staunch Christian and religious, like the first disciples, Christ has been reminding me that — besides the hundredfold reward — persecution or at least challenges in life will be part of the package of discipleship. With every challenge, our inner hope increases and we gain trust that the current situation will pass and joy shall return. This helps us to accept reality as it comes.

People around me may watch how I approach life, hoping to gain some encouragement and confidence in facing their own share of sorrows. But if I am

thrown into despair by situations in my life, they might be surprised — as I was by the perceived "resilient" tree drying — and begin to say, "If she is this broken, who can stand?"

The eucalyptus experience consoles me. Instead of being sad when I see her drying up from the drought, I can say confidently, "It is time to bring out the containers to collect water, because the rainy season is just about to begin."

Easter comes to help us rise to another level of existence with the risen Lord. I can only imagine what the death of Jesus could have meant for his disciples; it was a loss beyond description, as any of us can attest after losing a loved one. But then, in a little while, he appears again!

While we cannot change our past experiences of hardship, Easter comes as a reminder that there is life after all these struggles. The season encourages us to carry our crosses patiently and ungrudgingly since this is not the end, but the beginning of a new life — characterized by a deep awareness of the power of God which conquers even death.

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We realize that the peak of his suffering was the beginning of his victory over sin and death for our sake.

Jesus died for us and his rising marks our rising too. This "aliveness" has to be sustained. Easter is a time to thank God for what has been. In times of crisis, people come together, brought by the need to support one another through hard times. In the resurrection narrative, we see the disciples gathering in the upper room; they needed the companionship that gave them the courage to face another day without Jesus in their midst.

Our life situations put us on the cross now and then, so we are familiar with "crucifixion" in our lives. Equally, we have experienced coming out of an illness or financial constraints. It is a time that brings a lot of joy and a sense of achievement.

We live Easter pondering on the graces obtained through our pains and struggles, with joy and celebration. I want to sustain this joy, but after a short while I tend to forget that there is a season for everything — and whatever happens is for my good — and I begin complaining again. I am invited to the realization of the end to which the suffering points. It brings me closer to God and my fellow human beings, and a time to appreciate people I sometimes take for granted.

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Easter reminds me of the times when people have been there for me: during the long illness of a loved one, the loss of a loved one, or even the wedding of a loved one, when I could not have managed on my own.

The disciples remained united after Jesus was crucified, and from that moment on, a community was formed. They had something in common; they had undergone loss of a loved one and the accompanying humiliation and misunderstanding.

Humanity is the same, the world over, and Easter is a reminder of how much we need one another. The end of one problem should mark another Easter, earning us more favor with God and with fellow human beings. This becomes a cause for sustained joy since with every "Good Friday" challenge is an Easter: The problems will pass and we will have a reason to celebrate.

Let the realization of the love of God, who gave his *only begotten son so that those who believe in him might not perish but might have eternal life* (John 3:16), mark our renewed relationship with God that has its peak at Easter.

Then every day becomes Easter, and our spiritual drought becomes a thing of the past, since the joy of Easter continues to water our hearts sustaining our inner lives. Arise with the risen Lord and cheer up! Be happy, not because there are no challenges, but because this is the path to our true happiness.