
Croatia. Easter in earthquake-hit areas: the words of Msgr. Koši? (Sisak) “After this Calvary the victory of life over death awaits us”

Three months after the earthquake that hit Croatia on 29 December last, leaving eight dead and dozens wounded, the earthquake-stricken populations of the worst-hit towns, Petrinja, the epicentre 44 kilometres southeast of Zagreb, Glina, Sisak and other towns in the area, are preparing to celebrate Easter. Thousands remain homeless and still live in emergency housing or in other temporary accommodation units. A total of 20,000 people have been displaced, with around 40,000 buildings damaged and 31 churches destroyed, mostly in the area of Petrinja and other nearby villages.



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. made every effort to assist and comfort the local communities, especially those in the innermost villages, that are hard to reach. Thousands of volunteers from all over the country joined Caritas diocesan and Croatian Caritas workers working day and night to help those in need. Their efforts continue to this day. The present needs include, above all, household appliances for the families living in emergency housing units and for those who will return to their renovated homes. However, spiritual support is also needed, especially in this region marked by deeply rooted religious faith. Even more so now with the upcoming Easter celebrations. SIR interviewed the Bishop of Sisak, Msgr Vlado Koši?.a **Your Excellency, in the aftermath of the earthquake, how will Easter be celebrated this year?** At Easter we Christians are always full of joy: we celebrate not only the victory of Christ, but also our own. And so it will be again this year since.

despite the earthquake, our faith has remained unchanged.



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Tragedies like these bring us closer to God. The earthquake destroyed 31 of our 63 churches, but this will not prevent us from celebrating religious ceremonies and Holy Mass in faith and humility. Humility. The earthquake has shown that our safety and our salvation lie in God alone. After living through an experience like the earthquake we become fully conscious of the fact that our inner peace resides in God and in Him alone. *Hopefully our suffering will soon be over. After the Cross we look forward to celebrate the victory of Christ and of life over death.* **How is your faith community coping, and how are you preparing for this coming Easter?** We are preparing for Easter with prayer, penance and with acts of love and solidarity for those most in need. The earthquake came as a shock to us all, and we are reacting. During the past three months, our diocese distributed - in cooperation with the diocesan Caritas - countless food supplies and all sorts of other relief items in towns and villages, donated by the dioceses of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, by those in neighbouring countries where Croatians live, Hungary, Slovenia, Germany, Switzerland and Italy, and arriving from across the world. The Italian bishops are very close to us. Some of them, including Trieste, Padua and Mantua, want to come here to visit us, pandemic permitting.



We have since started to rebuild the churches and ecclesiastical buildings that were damaged by the seism, 79 of which are in our diocese. This

includes removing the rubble and ensuring the safety of the buildings. In conjunction with Caritas Croatia, we have contributed to the delivery of 200 temporary housing units. There are now over 2,000 modular homes, all located close to the destroyed properties, which testifies to the families' desire to stay, rebuild and make a fresh start. Concrete gestures of solidarity and prayer, that's how we are preparing. **At a momentous time like Easter, what does this material and spiritual closeness mean to you?** It represents a major gesture of neighbourly solidarity. There have been - and still are ongoing - beautiful and extraordinary gestures of solidarity. We are extremely grateful to all those people who are helping us. They make us feel that we are not alone and that evil will not prevail. Good always triumphs over evil. **With the majority of churches declared inaccessible, where will Easter services be held?** Our cathedral, devoted to the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, is unfit for use. We will celebrate all Easter services in the Church of St Quirinus, the Patron Saint of our diocese. This church was built about 20 years ago and has not sustained any damage. This Lent I visited several parishes left with no churches. We had to celebrate in the open air, in classrooms or in rented venues. At present, twelve modular places of worship are being built for parishes with no other options for celebrating Mass. **What are your hopes for the coming Easter that nobody would have imagined experiencing as an earthquake survivor?** Our hope is Christ, only in Him do we find salvation, for we know that earthly life will never be without problems. Challenges like the earthquake help us grow in maturity.

Life is also attained through the Cross. Both the earthquake and the pandemic are ordeals which strengthen our faith.



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I would like to send them a message of hope: Christ is Risen and gives us eternal life. Let us humble ourselves before the Lord, be optimistic and bear witness to hope. God is with us and, like Him, we too must remain close to all our suffering brothers and sisters who need our love and our help.

