Opinion

Guest Voices



People pay respects at a memorial at The Covenant School on March 29 for the six people who died in a mass shooting in Nashville, Tennessee. (RNS/Bob Smietana)



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As 2.2 billion Christians around the world recount the Passion and death of Jesus Christ in services this Holy Week, they know Easter is coming. On Easter Sunday, as they repeat in every church and chapel the story of the sightings of the simple worker from Nazareth after his crucifixion, they will know that every year this day means his resurrection.

Do they believe it? Can they? Can we?

We see everywhere news of children murdered in their classrooms, soldiers suffering in their homelands, people displaced by famine and politics, and a dying planet.

Tragedies multiply from town to town. We know about Nashville and Little Rock in the United States. There is the U.S. border with Mexico. And there are other borders, other countries, which beckon people to a better life, or simply life.

Related: Rebounding Pope Francis marks Palm Sunday in Vatican square

Where is the Easter promise in all this? Where is the hope, the joy? Where is the Jesus everyone is singing about?

Not long ago, Pope Francis spent a few days in Gemelli Hospital, giving the world a scare. The news from Rome was encouraging. He ate pizza with the staff. He baptized a baby. He signed the cast on a young boy's arm.

And when he was released, a reporter asked how he was. He answered, "Still alive!" And he was grateful for the care he had received.



Pope Francis autographs the plaster cast of a child as he leaves the Agostino Gemelli University Hospital in Rome on April 1 after receiving treatment for bronchitis, the Vatican said. (AP Photo/Gregorio Borgia)

Francis, after all, seems to believe that Jesus lives and acts in the world. The next day, Palm, or Passion, Sunday, he reminded us just who that Jesus is.

Francis preached: "Entire peoples are exploited and abandoned; the poor live on our streets and we look the other way; there are migrants who are no longer faces but numbers; there are prisoners who are disowned; people written off as problems."

Getting uncomfortable? That is his point.

Francis continued:

> Countless other abandoned persons are in our midst, invisible, hidden, discarded with white gloves: unborn children, the elderly who live alone: they could perhaps be your father or mother, your grandfather or grandmother, left alone in retirement homes, the sick whom no one visits, the disabled who are ignored, and the young burdened by great interior emptiness, with no one prepared to listen to their cry of pain.

Had enough? We cannot ignore what the pope is talking about. In temperature-controlled rooms, the well-fed can simply turn off the news and not think about tragedies and despair.

But they are still out there, the ill, the lonely, the frightened individuals of every age, race and gender. They may or may not be recognizable; they may or may not be in the news. But their empty faces are out there, somewhere, filled with fear and doubt.

That is where the Easter promise comes in. The Christians who sometimes wonder where Jesus is, or if he does exist at all, can look to find him everywhere, anywhere.

Because he does exist, right there in front of us all.

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A few months back, a homeless man died in Rome in the shadow of St. Peter's Basilica. Francis preached about him the other day, saying: "I think of the German so-called 'street person' who died under the colonnade, alone and abandoned. He is Jesus for each of us."

That is the answer, after all. The Jesus in our lives may in fact be the one we step over on the way to work.

So, for the Christians who wonder about the Easter promise, about the joy and hope it can bring, perhaps Francis' words can bring some solace.

His point? If you are looking for Jesus, he can be found anywhere. He is in the classroom, cowered behind a desk. She is sleeping in a muddy foxhole. He is trekking through a desert or a jungle. She is in a nursing home.

And there are people out there helping. We need look no farther than our own cities, towns or villages to see the resurrected Christ. He — and she — is all around us. And the resurrection lives in us all as well.

Maybe first, we need to look into a mirror.