



## 2017 EASTER MESSAGE

### The Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB Archbishop of Perth

When Jesus was executed in the most brutal fashion on the first Good Friday his followers, and especially his closest disciples, must have experienced a sense of shocking disillusionment, despair and shame. The man in whom they had placed all their hopes, and who had promised so much, seemed to have failed miserably. As they gathered together, if they did, on that terrible Friday evening, they must have been numb with horror. In spite of all that Jesus had said to them about rising from the dead, how could that incomprehensible promise overcome their sorrow and sense of betrayal?

For many of the disciples, the crucifixion of Jesus may well have been in a sense the death not only of their hope but also of their faith. Jesus had spoken of a God of such unbelievable tenderness, compassion, forgiveness and love that with the death of Jesus, and the dawning suspicion that he must have been wrong all along, their faith in the God of Jesus must have been shaken to its core.

Perhaps it is only when we reflect on the depths of this despair that we can begin to understand the incredible effect the resurrection of Jesus had on them, transforming them from timid and terrified men into bold and courageous witnesses to the Lord. Against all reason and every possible human expectation, they now knew that Jesus was alive. Death had lost its power, cruelty and evil had not after all had the last word, and the teachings of Jesus had been confirmed: God really was as Jesus had proclaimed him to be. This was a message they knew they had to share with others.

The experience of disillusionment, despair and shame is one that so many of us experience at different times in our lives. Sometimes this experience arises because of our own failures and limitations. Sometimes it is the result of those closest to us whose lives spiral out of control because of the choices they make, or the situations in which they inadvertently find themselves. And sometimes it is because of the cruelty and violence we see around us, in our own neighbourhoods, in our society generally, and in those parts of the world which are being torn apart, even in the name of religion.

In the face of this dark reality which marks our own lives and the world in which we live, is there still any reason to hope? For us as Christians, the answer is found in the resurrection of Jesus. Ultimately of course this means that the answer is found in the existence and fidelity of a God of love. The death and resurrection of Jesus changes everything. Now we know that nothing, not even extreme cruelty, injustice and death, is more powerful than God's power and presence in the world.

After his resurrection Jesus promised to be with us to the end of time. His victory over death is not a past event but a present reality. If we do not experience it in our own lives, or see it reflected and realised in the lives of our Christian brothers and sisters, perhaps it is because we ourselves have forgotten that the Lord seeks to be present and active in the world through us. As Saint Teresa of Avila reminds us in a prayer attributed to her:



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*Christ has no body now on earth but yours.  
Yours are the only hands with which He can do His work.  
Yours are the only feet with which He can go about the world.  
Yours are the only eyes through which His compassion can shine forth upon a  
troubled world.  
Christ has no body on earth but yours.*

In our daily lives we can be signs and instruments of the Lord's loving, healing, restoring and saving presence in the world – or we can obscure and frustrate that presence by our own failures or our own indifference. My hope and prayer for Easter this year is that all of us, as followers of the Good Shepherd, will recommit ourselves to walking in his footsteps. In this way the promise and hope of Easter will not be a fanciful dream, or something for which we must wait until the next life, but rather, albeit in a limited and fragile way, a reality which like the mustard seed of which Jesus speaks in the Gospel begins in small and hidden ways but gradually grows into a vast tree which provides a home for everyone. Pope St John Paul II once wrote of the Church, that it is called to be “a home and school of communion”. Pope Francis has spoken of it as a place where “wounds are healed and hearts are warmed”. Together, with our hearts open to the power of God's renewing grace, we can help the dreams of these two great men become a reality here in our corner of the world.

I wish you all a very happy and holy Easter season.

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