



Easter Vigil/Easter Day - Homily

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St Mary's Cathedral, Perth
Saturday, 19 April 2014 and Sunday, 20 April 2014

For those of you who were here on Good Friday afternoon for our celebration of the Passion of the Lord, the contrast between the starkness of the Cathedral then and the beauty of the arrangements tonight, with all the lights blazing, the flowers beautifully arranged, the glorious music and the flickering candles, could not be greater. On Friday, we came to gaze on a man of suffering and on an empty cross. The cross was empty because the man who had been crucified was dead and buried. This evening, we gather in the same cathedral, this time to gaze not on an empty cross but on an empty tomb. The cross stood silent and empty on Good Friday evening because of the victory of the powers of death. The tomb stands empty this evening because of the victory of the powers of life. We are here tonight because we want to celebrate God's final and definitive answer to the problem of evil. In the resurrection of Jesus, God has given us the absolute assurance that life is more powerful than death – and that love is more powerful than hate. We need to hear this message, and celebrate this extraordinary truth, because it is all too easy to be intimidated by the power of hatred, beaten down by the force of anger and resentment, and demoralised by our own sins and failings. We need to be realistic about all this, of course. God calls us to live in the real world with all its struggles and its ambiguity and its pain. But we also are invited to be, and deep within ourselves really long to be, people of hope. And hope, even in the face of what can at times look like hopeless situations, is the Lord's precious Easter gift to us.

As we look back over the last year, and perhaps the last decade, we can indeed be overwhelmed by the many tragic events which have taken place in Australia and in the wider world. As we look at the growing culture of violence in our city, the disregard for human life which seems to be growing stronger in our society, the turmoil in places like the Ukraine, Syria and parts of Latin America and Africa, and as we struggle to respond with justice and with generous love to the many people who, in fleeing persecution and misery, want to settle among us, we might be tempted to believe that hate is the stronger force; that violence is the ultimate victor; and that closing down and closing in is the only answer – but, year after year, we keep coming back to celebrate Easter, because the deepest part of us, the God part of us if I can put it that way, simply will not let us believe that.

In many ways, our journey of faith is little different from that of the first disciples of Jesus. When they were called by Him, and began to live with Him, and listen to Him, and travel with Him, they began to experience a new kind of God, different from the one they had been taught to believe in, the one who punished enemies, who sent plagues and fires and famines, who needed to be appeased and placated and, if possible, kept at a safe distance. Gradually, they came to sense,



and to hope, that the God whom Jesus spoke about, and the God to whom Jesus witnessed with His whole life, *might actually be the real God*, a God to believe in, a God to trust, a God to love. It was the God who, in and through Jesus, said to the woman caught in adultery, "I don't condemn you". It was the God who, in and through Jesus, said to the blind man who had asked for the gift of sight, "Of course I want to heal you". It was the God who, through Jesus, asked the sick and the lonely, "What do you want me to do for you?" It was the God who, through Jesus, took pity on the crowds and fed the hungry. It was the God who, through Jesus, was revealed as the loving Father who forgives His prodigal children. It was the God who, through Jesus, forgave even those who were executing Him. This was a God to believe in. This was the kind of God to bring people hope, to bring people alive.

With the death of Jesus, all the hopes and dreams of the disciples died too. It must have seemed to them that Jesus had been deceived, that He had it all wrong, and that it had all just been too good to be true. How could God let it all end up like this? If God was all that Jesus had said He was, why wasn't God there to save Jesus from death? Were evil and hatred after all much stronger than goodness and gentleness and love? These are the very questions so many of us find ourselves asking today. The dreadful despair of the disciples at the death of Jesus was all the deeper because of the greatness of their hopes and dreams, their now broken and shattered hopes and dreams. Are our hopes and dreams also empty and foolish?

Into the very centre of the despair and the disillusionment that gripped those first disciples comes Jesus, risen from the dead, alive again and in a whole new way, against all sense of reality or expectation. The disciples struggled to believe, as we often do, but they saw and they knew that the dead Jesus was now alive. And with the risen Jesus, the hopes and dreams of the disciples about the God of love also rose from the ashes of despair. In the resurrection, God is saying to the disciples, "All that you have hoped for, all that you have learnt to dream of, in Jesus, is now a reality for you. I really am as Jesus has revealed me to be. In his resurrection, Jesus is my stamp, my guarantee, my promise to fulfill your deepest hopes and dreams".

God is saying the same to us tonight. In the resurrection of Jesus, we find the final confirmation, that God is as Jesus tells us; that, in coming to know Jesus, we come to know God, who loves us so much and wants us to be in union with Him so much, that He came among us as one like us, so that we could see in Jesus, and touch in Jesus, and love in Jesus, the God whom we otherwise could never have seen, never have touched, and never have truly loved.

This is the source of our hope. This is the source of our peace. Let us hold fast to Jesus, let us unite ourselves with Him in this Eucharist tonight. Let us say to Him, "Lord Jesus, risen from the dead, spring of new life for all of us, come into our lives, our hearts tonight, and fill us with that gift of peace and joy which comes from knowing that, in you, we have found the true face of the living God."