



Memorial Mass for Victims of Malaysian Airways Flight MH17 – Homily

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St Mary's Cathedral, Perth
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Last Sunday, here in this Cathedral, I spoke of the terrible atrocity which had taken place in Ukraine and of the wave of revulsion, sorrow and anger which was then, and still is, sweeping the world.

Today, nearly a week later, and nine days after Malaysian Flight MH17 was destroyed with the loss of life of every single person on that plane, we continue to be confronted by this awful tragedy and we continue to struggle to comprehend how such a terrible thing could have happened. As we gather in the Cathedral today, to celebrate this special Mass to pray for all the victims of this terrible incident, and for their families and friends who are mourning their loss, we are given an opportunity, in the context of prayer, of faith and of profound concern for the victims and their families, to reflect on what has happened and to try and make whatever sense of it we can.

The first thing to say is that, as Christians, we are people of hope, not ultimately people of despair. This does not mean that we are naïve, or blind to the awful power of evil at work among us, but it does mean that, at times of confusion, of fear, of anger and even perhaps of something close to despair, we look beyond ourselves to the Lord and put our trust, ultimately, not in ourselves but in Him. In His own moment of ultimate distress, Jesus cried out to His Father, "Into your hands I entrust my spirit". Our faith calls us, in this time of great anguish, to entrust ourselves, and those we love, to the same loving God. Both in life and in death, it is God who can enable us to understand the mystery of our life.

Today, we are praying for everyone caught up in this terrible tragedy. It is natural, of course, that we focus a little more directly on those from our own community who have lost their lives and those among us who are left to grieve. Nine residents of Western Australia are numbered among the victims of this senseless atrocity, the youngest of them just eight years old. Present in the Cathedral with us today are relatives, friends and colleagues of Mrs Edel Mahady, who worked for 14 years at the Good Shepherd Primary School in Kelmscott. Possibly other victims of this tragedy are known to many of you. I hope the knowledge that we are all gathered together in prayer to entrust your loved ones to the Lord, and that our prayers are also being offered for you, will give you a sense of support and of hope.

It is important, too, to say that the courage and dignity shown by the families of those who died in this atrocity is also a source of hope for all of us. The extraordinarily powerful words of the parents of Evie, Mo and Otis Maslin reported in yesterday's press are a challenge to us all. I quote them now, mindful of the desire of the Maslin family that their privacy be respected at this



terrible time but mindful, too, that their words are a remarkable gift to us all. *“No hate in the world is as strong as the love we have for our children; no hate in the world is as strong as the love we have for Grandad Nick; no hate in the world is as strong as the love we have for each other; this is a revelation that gives us some comfort.”*

As the events following this atrocity have unfolded, many of us have felt a sense of horror and, yes, perhaps even despair. The callous way in which the crash site, now a sacred site, has been treated, the ducking and weaving of those who have sought to deny their responsibility for this dreadful incident, the seeming impossibility of even this horrific event to bring a pause, let alone an end, to the violence and hatred being exposed in the fields of Eastern Ukraine – all of this can only lead us to ask how human beings can do these things to each other. As I said last Sunday, there is a disease rampant in the conflict being played out in Ukraine, and not only there. It is at work in the Holy Land, in the Middle East, in Africa, and in so many parts of the world. It is the disease of hardness of heart. It is the disease of self-interest and self-justification which drives out compassion and simple human decency. It is the disease of ignorance of, and forgetfulness of, the love of God who created all of us and who loves each of His children with a passionate love. It is the disease of a blindness which will not allow us to love as God loves, even though this is the very reason why God has given us the gift of life in the first place.

The sad truth is that it is a disease to which we, too, can so easily succumb, becoming ourselves bringers of pain, of anguish and of despair into the lives of others. It is our commitment to our own journey of faith, our own journey with God, which will enable us to resist falling into this dark place in our lives. It is our belief that love is stronger than hate, and our commitment to live each day in and from this belief, that can sustain hope in the face of the violence that confronts us, both in distant places and sometimes in our own hearts. It is this belief that can help us never to lose sight of the beauty of our world, and of each other, which could so easily be obscured by the terrible destruction of flight MH17 and by the vicious and cruel conflicts so prevalent around the world. This belief is not a foolish or empty one: it is grounded in the fidelity of God whose Son gave His life for us and who was raised to new life by His Father.

As we pray for all those who have lost their lives in the skies over Ukraine, and all those whose lives today are filled with anguish because of their loss, let us also pray with urgency and with faith that the hard hearts of those responsible for this terrible event might somehow be touched by the wave of mourning and sorrow which has been unleashed. Let us pray that a deep sense of humanity might prevail in all who must now try to lead us forward out of this tragedy. And let us pray for ourselves that, in our own families and among our own friends and in our own communities, we too might not be overcome by that hardness of heart which closes us to the sufferings of others and allows us only to see our own selfish desires and plans. In this time of sorrow, let us hold those we love close to us and tell them how precious they are to us.

For all the passengers and crew of Malaysian Flight MH17, we pray, "eternal rest give to them O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May they rest in peace. Amen".