



## Homily - Easter Vigil / Sunday 2015

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St Mary's Cathedral, Perth  
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On what has turned out to be a rather cool evening here in Perth, we began our celebrations by gathering around the new Easter Fire. In many ancient cultures, this fire was meant to symbolise the victory of Spring over Winter. In the early centuries of Christianity, this tradition was adopted by the Church to symbolise the victory of life over death. In the resurrection of Jesus which we celebrate tonight, this is the heart of everything. The power of death has been broken and, in the words of one of the early Popes, Pope St Leo the Great, "*the uninterrupted pattern of death was broken and Jesus made temporary what until then had been eternal. By dying,*" the Pope went on, "*Jesus submitted to the destructive power of death but by rising again He destroyed that power*".

At a time in history when the power of death, hatred and destruction is played out each evening in the daily news on television, it can be hard for us to believe that what the resurrection of Jesus claims to promise is really true. The dreadful situation of violence in so many parts of the Middle East, in parts of the African continent, and in so many other places, could easily lead us to a place of fear and even despair. The event we are celebrating took place 2,000 years ago. Has it really made any difference? Has the world really changed? Are the words of the angel to the disciples who come to the empty tomb - *do not be afraid* - just an empty slogan or can we put our trust in them? After all, they are words which, according to the Gospel, are often on the lips of Jesus Himself as He speaks to His disciples in all kinds of difficult and challenging situations. What sense can we make of these words in the light of what we see around us?

One answer to this, I think, lies in remembering who it is to whom these words are spoken. On the day of the resurrection, according to the different accounts in the Gospels, they were spoken by the angel to the women who came to the tomb and by Jesus Himself when He first appeared to His closest disciples. Throughout His life, they are words which were spoken by Jesus to His disciples whenever they felt overwhelmed by fear, by doubt or by confusion. They were the words spoken by the angel to Mary when she was told that she was to be the mother of the Messiah.

In every case, they were words spoken to people who had already entrusted their lives to the Lord. Those people were not perfect. Their faith was sometimes weak. They did not always understand what was going on. But they had made a decision to follow the Lord. They had committed their lives to Him. Sometimes they found it difficult, even impossible, to live up to the commitments they had made. Think of St Peter. He was the leader of the apostles, and one of the three apostles chosen by Jesus to be closest to Him. And yet, when it came to the crunch,



he allowed his fear to overwhelm him and he denied, not once but three times, that he even knew who Jesus was.

The important point is that, even though these men and women, chosen specially by Jesus and very close to Him, failed Him often, they nevertheless had made the fundamental decision to commit their lives to Him. It was that decision, and that commitment, which was at the heart of their lives. It was that decision, and that commitment, which kept open in their hearts the space for Jesus to continue to be present with them and to continue His work of healing them and making them whole.

In the end, they knew that their lives were safe in the hands of Jesus. They knew that they could rely on Him, and on His strength and His power, when their own strength and power failed them. They knew that the journey of their life was not one they had to travel alone but one they were being invited to travel with Him as their companion and guide. And, because of all of that, the words of the angel, and even more the words of Jesus, both made perfect sense to them and gave them strength and hope.

Pope Francis recently made this point very clear when he spoke to bishops, priests and religious in Naples. He reminded them that if they really did their best to keep Jesus at the centre of their lives, the difficulties and challenges of life would not magically disappear but those listening to Him would, he said, "face them in a different way".

This is the message of Easter. This is the heart of our Christian hope. No matter what comes, we do not need to be afraid because, united to Jesus and travelling the journey of our lives with Him beside us, we can draw on His power, His courage, His fidelity and His compassion when our own threaten to fail us.

Jesus, risen from the dead and alive with us, is at the heart of Easter, just as He is at the heart of the Church, and of every aspect of the Church's life. He calls to us and asks us to make room for Him so that He can be the companion on our journey that we all so deeply need. Open your hearts to Him, let Him be the way you follow, the truth you believe and the life you live - and do not be afraid.