



Easter Vigil – Easter Sunday 2022

Homily

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Archbishop of Perth**

**Sunday 17 April 2022
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

In the story of the Last Supper which we commemorated last Thursday night, and about which we read in Saint John's gospel yesterday afternoon during our Good Friday celebration of the Lord's passion, we are told that, as soon as Judas, the one who betrayed Jesus, had left the supper to carry out his act of treachery, "night had fallen". This was not simply a piece of information about how late in the evening it was. It was rather a solemn and sombre reminder that, with the betrayal of Judas, the power and destructiveness of evil had finally been unleashed. That evil was to reach its culmination when Jesus, the Son of God, God among us, after long hours of brutal and callous suffering, cried out with a loud voice from the cross to which he was nailed, and breathed his last breath.

The death of Jesus was a terrible thing for him and for his family. Jesus himself, according to Saint Mark's Gospel, had been tempted to think that God his Father had abandoned him, although in Saint Luke's gospel we are told that the last words of the dying Jesus were words of trust: "*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit*".

For those who had loved Jesus and who were there at the foot of the cross as he died, especially his mother, Mary, the suffering must have been almost unbearable. And so, too, must have been the suffering of his disciples, most of whom had deserted him at the end, afraid that if they stayed they, too, might suffer the same fate as Jesus. For those disciples of Jesus, his death, terrible in itself, was made even worse, because with the death of Jesus the hopes and dreams of the disciples must have died with him.

They were the ones, after all, who had responded so quickly and eagerly to his call to leave everything and follow him. They had listened to him preach and teach, they had seen him bring healing and hope to the broken and the suffering, they had come to know him as a true and faithful friend, and they had come to believe, or at least to hope, that the God about whom he had spoken so passionately, the God of tender compassion and generous, open-hearted forgiveness, was indeed the true and only God – a God to believe in, a God to trust, a God to hope in, a God to love.

And then Jesus died, in a brutal and cruel and agonising way, and with him so, too must have died this newly-born faith of the disciples. *We had hoped*, they must have said to each other on



the day after Jesus' death, *that what Jesus said about God was true*. They would have wanted desperately to believe it. They would have wanted to hang on to the promise and the joy which came with belief in such a God. But now Jesus was dead. The dream he had created for them was shattered. Indeed, night really had fallen – over their lives, over their spirits, over their hearts. We know what this is like: broken dreams and unfulfilled hopes are our story as much as they were the story of the first disciples. They are certainly the story which is being written in blood for the people of Ukraine even as we gather in the Cathedral tonight/today.

But for those first disciples the story was not ended, as they had thought. The women who had gone to the tomb to anoint the dead body of Jesus had found the tomb empty, and they came rushing in to tell the disciples that Jesus was alive. At first they couldn't believe it – it was, after all, a ridiculous tale – but gradually a spark of hope was kindled in their hearts and it was soon to burst into flame when they, too, encountered the risen Jesus. Night had fallen on the dreadful first Good Friday, but on the first day of the week, on the first Easter Sunday, “at the first sign of dawn” as Saint Luke's Gospel puts it, the rising sun of a new day was eclipsed by the rising of the Son of God to new life.

What this meant for those first disciples was that their faith, so shattered by the horror of the death of Jesus, was not just reborn but exploded into something new and completely life-changing; everything that Jesus had said and taught about God, every unbelievable and wonderful thing, was confirmed. God really is as Jesus claims him to be.

Today we can, and we should, be beside ourselves with joy because we know that we can now, because of the resurrection of Jesus, entrust ourselves and everything and everyone that matters us, to this God – whose love for us does never fail, whose patience with us does never run out, and whose forgiveness does know no bounds.

Today there are many people who are still waiting for that first sight of dawn. The dark night of suffering, of loneliness, of rejection and of fear, still dominates their lives. For the people of Ukraine in particular this dark night must seem at the moment to be never-ending, as it must seem, too, for those who are trapped in poverty, in the nightmare of homelessness, or the prison of abuse or violence. As disciples of Jesus we are called not just to enter into the light ourselves and rejoice in it, but to be bearers of that light to others. It might seem to us that the light we can bring is not enough to dispel the darkness – and this may be true. But it might be enough to be a flickering sign of hope for those who otherwise may soon give up all hope. God has given us the gift of faith not only for our own sake but that so we can share the beauty of our faith with all those who are open to receive it.

May our celebration of the resurrection of Jesus this year renew and deepen our own faith, confirm us in our belief in the limitless love and mercy of God, and inspire us to be signs and bearers of the love and mercy of God to all those for whom the first light of the Easter day has still not yet dawned.