



## **Easter Vigil & Easter Sunday**

### **Homily**

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Archbishop of Perth**

**Sunday 9 April 2023  
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

Every year on Good Friday, we listen to the story of the suffering and death of Jesus as it is told in Saint John's Gospel. It ends in a rather bleak and stark way:

*They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it, with spices, in linen cloths, following the Jewish burial custom. At the place where he had been crucified there was a garden, and in this garden a new tomb, in which no-one had yet been buried. Since it was the Jewish Day of Preparation, and the tomb was near at hand, they laid Jesus there.*

These matter-of-fact words marked the end, or at least so most people thought, of the life and ministry of Jesus. What had begun with so much promise and had engendered so much hope ended, for so many of Jesus's disciples, in disillusionment, and for some even in despair. All that Jesus had said about God, his Father – God's love, compassion, readiness to forgive, and desire to bring healing and wholeness - all this seemed to have come to nothing. What a bleak day the day we now call Holy Saturday must have been for them.

When we begin to grasp the depths of the sorrow and disillusionment, which the disciples of Jesus must have experienced, we can also begin to understand something of the overwhelming, overpowering joy which they must have experienced when Jesus showed himself alive again to them after the resurrection.

This is captured very beautifully in the story of the encounter between the risen Jesus and Mary Magdalen in the garden near the tomb. Mary was sitting outside the empty tomb, overcome by her grief, when she saw a man whom she presumed to be the gardener. She asked him if he knew who had taken the body of Jesus, and where they may have taken it. In reply, the man simply called her by name, Mary. Hearing her name Mary's eyes were opened, and she realised that it was Jesus who stood before her. In her joy and delight Mary must have thrown her arms around him because the gospel tells us that Jesus said to her "*Do not cling to me, Mary, because I have not yet ascended to the Father*".

It is understandable that Mary should want to cling to Jesus. She had lost him once, only to have him given back to her. She would not want to lose him again. No doubt, as Jesus made himself



known on many occasions to his disciples in the days that followed, they too must have felt the same. The two disciples on the road to Emmaus certainly did. Even before they had realised that it was the risen Jesus who was walking with them on their journey, they did not want to lose him. “Stay with us, Lord,” they said. “It is nearly evening, and the day is almost over”.

As we celebrate tonight this wonderful feast of the Lord’s resurrection from the dead we know, too, that it only makes sense in the light of his whole life, and especially of his death. The resurrection is the final and absolute confirmation of the truth of all that Jesus came to do for us, to be for us, and to teach us. God really is as close to us, and as compassionate and merciful towards us, and as loving, as Jesus proclaimed him to be.

But tonight’s celebration also only makes sense when we remember what comes after: the Lord’s Ascension to his Father in heaven, and then the sending of the Holy Spirit upon that first community of believers, the first gathering of the newly born Church, to which we also belong.

Having lost Jesus once Mary Magdalene did not want to lose him again, nor did his disciples. And, of course, nor did Jesus want to leave them or leave us. He came for us because He loves us. He was sent by His Father in heaven because his Heavenly Father loves us. And the Holy Spirit sent to us by the Father and the Son comes to us because He loves us.

This is the deepest identity of the Church. We are a community called together by God to be a living sign of the presence of God with us still: the presence of the Father who loves us; the presence of Son, who reveals God’s love to us; and the presence of the Spirit, who by forming us into a holy people makes us the body of Christ, the sign and the bearer of God’s love for not just for us but for everyone.

Each person called into the Church by baptism becomes a member of this privileged people. And we here tonight count ourselves among those who, in a special way, have been given this precious gift of knowing and experiencing God’s love. It is this knowledge and this experience that we are called to carry with us and share with everyone we meet. It is this knowledge and this experience which can, if we are truly open to it, set our hearts on fire, just as the hearts of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus burnt brightly within them as they found the Lord walking with them. They had been running away from Jerusalem, which they had come to see as the place of failure and danger. Having met the risen Lord, they went rushing back to Jerusalem, which they now realised was the place of new hope, new challenges, and great opportunities.

In coming to the Cathedral tonight to celebrate the great feast of Easter, we to have been drawn to the place where we can encounter Jesus. He wants to set our hearts on fire. He wants us to take our rightful place in the community of his disciples. He wants us to embrace the adventure of being a member of that holy people who are called to be the great sign and the great bearer of God’s extraordinary love for everyone. Together, through the grace of God, we can help to make



the Church what it tragically sometimes fails to be but is always called to be by God. We can be the face, and the hands and the heart of Jesus to all those we meet.

May our Easter celebration this year help us all respond to this invitation and this challenge.