



**Easter Vigil
Easter Sunday**

Homily

**Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB
Archbishop of Perth**

**Saturday 30 March & Sunday 31 March, 2024
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

In 2009, when I was still an auxiliary bishop in Melbourne, the Archbishop of Melbourne asked me to go to Rome to represent the archdiocese at the handing over of the World Youth Day cross and icon to the Church in Madrid, which had been entrusted with hosting the World Youth Day in 2012. Sydney, as some of you will remember, hosted World Youth Day in 2008, and on Palm Sunday of the following year, the pope formally commissioned the Church in Spain for this important task.

In asking me to go to Rome for the handover, the archbishop suggested that I should take the opportunity to remain in Rome for the celebration of Easter. He pointed out that while bishops are normally in their own dioceses for Easter, as an auxiliary bishop I could be spared on that occasion, which might be my only chance as a bishop to celebrate Easter in Rome.

One thing which struck me very strongly was this: here in Australia we are so used to celebrating Easter during the season of Autumn that we sometimes forget that in that part of the world where the Christian celebration of Easter first originated, it takes place in Spring. In the northern hemisphere the link between the new life which bursts through in nature following what are often harsh winters, and the new life of Jesus which bursts through as the stone is rolled away from the tomb in which His body had been laid, is very obvious. It is not quite the same for us here in Australia.

For us, instead, the signs of an approaching winter are already beginning to appear. Many of the trees around the Cathedral are starting to lose their leaves; the mornings and evenings are becoming a little cooler; and even here in the sunny West, our minds are beginning to turn to the need to dig out some warmer clothes from our cupboards just in case.

For that reason, for us as Christians, the autumn season seems to capture better the mood of Good Friday and Holy Saturday than it does the mood of Easter Sunday. Good Friday and Holy Saturday speak to us of suffering, of death, and of the emptiness of bereavement. They match well the starkness of winter which will soon be upon us.



Those of us who have lost loved ones will have some sense of how the first followers of Jesus must have felt on the first Good Friday and Holy Saturday, the days of His death and burial. The hopes and dreams of those disciples, and the audacious thought that God might be as loving, as forgiving, as compassionate and as merciful as Jesus had proclaimed Him to be: all of this would have died within the disciple as they experienced the dreadful death of Jesus on the Cross.

But then, incredibly, their sorrow and despair turned to unquenchable joy as they heard the news of His resurrection to new life, and as so many of them experienced His presence among them. Hatred, cruelty, violence, and the destructive power of death, they now realised, did not have the last word after all. Instead love, kindness, gentleness, and the power of a life lived with fidelity had the last word. Or rather, God had the last word.

We live in a society which is increasingly structured in such a way as to make it easy - indeed I would say perhaps *too easy* - to push God to one side. Trying, for example, to balance the demands of family life and the raising of children with the pressures and expectations of our working lives, does not leave too much time for attending to our life of faith and our relationship with God. But if it is true, as one of the great Saints of the Christian tradition once said, that God has made us for Himself and our hearts will always be restless until they rest in Him, then the society and culture which we are in the process of creating, rather than supporting and enabling true, human flourishing may well end up doing exactly the opposite. Without God our inner restlessness will grow. That restlessness can only be masked by the distractions and busy-ness of our lives for a time. Eventually we will need to find God, or perhaps it is better to say to let ourselves be found by God, if we are looking for peace of mind and heart.

This is why the Christian belief in the resurrection of Jesus holds so much promise for us, but also so much challenge. Had Jesus simply been a wandering prophet, a dreamer, an idealist, who proposed a beautiful, but impossibly unrealistic vision of how life should be, we could spend some time romantically fantasising about this attractive but unattainable ideal, and then quickly put it aside as we turn back to the hard reality of life. But if, as we believe, God did raise Jesus from the dead, then God has stamped his seal of approval on all that Jesus said, and did, and stood for. It is not an impossible dream, or a romantic ideal, or an unattainable goal. It is God's revelation of His very purpose in creating the universe, in creating the earth, in creating humanity, in creating each one of us. The resurrection holds the key to what it really means to be truly and fully human, truly and fully alive.

Because of the resurrection, the way of Jesus becomes the way for all of us to follow, if we wish to live, fully and faithfully, the life which God has given us. What Jesus said to His first disciples at the Last Supper, and what our celebration of the resurrection of Jesus to new life confirms,



becomes vital for each one of us: that He is our Way and is calling us to follow; that He is our Truth, and is calling us to believe; that He is our life, and is calling us to live.

May your celebration of Easter this year be the beginning of a deeper recognition of the wonderful gift which God gives us in his Son. It is a gift – He, Jesus, is a gift - of life and joy, of peace and hope, of the fulfilment of our deepest desires. I invite you to welcome the Risen Jesus into your hearts and into your lives as we all celebrate his rising to new life together.