



EASTER MESSAGE 2018

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

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In the Gospel According to John, we read that *“on the evening of that same day (that is the day of the resurrection), the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you’ . When he had said this he showed them his hands and his side”* (John 20:19-20).

The words *“Peace be with you”* are often on the lips of Jesus, especially in the Gospel of John. They are particularly prominent in the stories of the appearance of the risen Jesus to his disciples. For that reason, we might well see them as capturing something that lies at the heart of this great mystery of the Lord’s rising from the dead. They are, then, in a sense, the Lord’s Easter gift to us.

“Peace be with you” is easy to say, but it can seem very empty to those who in fact experience little or no peace in their lives. I think of those who continue to suffer the effects of all kinds of abuse, including sexual abuse. I think of those who have fled their homelands in terror and fear and can find no welcome wherever they go. I think of those parents who watch as their children, no matter how old they may be, make decisions which only bring grief to them and those around them. For all these people, and so many others, the idea of peace seems like an impossible dream or a cruel hoax. Indeed, it can sometimes seem that way to all of us, especially at those times when our lives seem to be unravelling around us.

What then do we make of this Easter gift of peace of which the Lord speaks? Two thoughts come to my mind. The first is one which comes to us from St Teresa of Avila. *“Christ has no body now but yours”*, she writes, *“no, hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world”*. What St Teresa is reminding us is that one of the ways in which the Lord has chosen to be present in the world is in and through us. If the gift of peace, the Lord’s peace, does not seem to be very evident in our families, and our communities, and our society, perhaps it is at least partly because we are not open to the Lord’s wish to offer that gift to others through us.

The second thought is this. The gift of the Lord’s peace is exactly that: a gift. The Lord offers it to us, but if our eyes or ears are closed to him we will not even realize it is being offered, or what



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kind of gift it really is. The Lord does say, after all, that the peace he offers is not like the peace the world promises – it is something deeper, and truer, and profoundly life-giving.

Our life within the Church, and especially through the sacraments, is the way in which we grow in our desire for this gift of peace, in our capacity to receive and welcome this gift, and in our passion to share this gift with others. This of course is because all the sacraments draw us into a deeper communion of love with Jesus, the giver of peace. In the end it is friendship with him which we offer to others. His friendship is the foundation of our peace.

My prayer for you all is that, through your celebration of Easter this year, you and your family and friends might experience the wonderful gift of the Lord's Easter peace and become sharers of this gift with all those you meet.

May you all have a happy and holy Easter.

+ Timothy Costelloe SDB

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