



Easter Vigil

Homily

**By the Most Rev Bishop Don Sproxton
Auxiliary Bishop of Perth**

**St Gerard's Church, Mirrabooka Parish
Sunday 9 April 2023**

I was asked recently if Easter was celebrated in the early Church.

My response was “Yes” for the early Church celebrated nothing else. But they did not focus on the Resurrection alone, rather they celebrated the entire Passover mystery: Christ’s passing over from death to new life, and to glory with the Father.

The Lord’s Passover was not an annual celebration but weekly. This the reason for the Christian gathering on Sunday.

Sunday became the Christian holy day, for the communities to gather to commemorate the re-creation or the restoration of creation. Previously, the Sabbath day, which began at sunset on Friday, had been the day to celebrate the work of creation by God and was legislated as a day of rest in the Law. The change to Sunday had become established by the time St Paul wrote 1Cor, about 57 AD.

The annual festival of the Lord’s Passover, Easter as we know it, began to be celebrated some time later and was taken up throughout the Church before 200 AD.

Tonight, we pattern for our Vigil tonight is that of the Jewish Passover, with the addition of the central element that we are looking so much to and is to follow shortly. We gathered around a bonfire in the dark, and we waited until everyone had arrived and the assembly had been formed.

The Jewish Passover begins with the Blessing of the Lights. The sun has set and the house is in darkness. The lights penetrate the darkness and the family sees one another. So we lit the Easter Candle and followed as it was brought into the darkened church. Its light pierced the darkness as did the little candles we carried. We began immediately with the Proclamation of the Resurrection of Christ.

The Haggadah follows in the Jewish Passover. Readings from the scriptures are shared remembering how God saved his chosen people, especially from Egypt. And there are other texts



recalled that remind the family of God's closeness and salvation given in the past and promised to every generation. Tonight, during the Lord's Pasch, we have listened to the scriptures of the marvels of God, and the promises and explanations.

The celebration of Baptism is the new element in the Passover. We celebrate the essence of the Christian Vigil: the paschal mystery of Christ's dying and rising by which we are redeemed, and our lives are immersed.

Redemption is not just a theology. We share personally in Christ's paschal mystery and are redeemed. When the young ones are to be baptised into Christ's death, they will rise from the water as new creations, redeemed and filled with the Spirit of the Risen Christ. They will come to know that the Spirit will be their companion and strength for the rest of their lives.

The Passover Meal is celebrated around a meal at the family table. For the Christians this became the agape meal, the Eucharist. We celebrate with profound thanks the love and the mercy of God who has given such a gift in Christ. During the Eucharist, we see clearly our brothers and sisters in the faith, who we are called to love.

Many of the older members of this parish will remember Fr Francisco Mascarenhas. He became parish priest here a little while after I left St Gerard's to be ordained a bishop. Fr Francisco was called by the Father yesterday, on Good Friday morning. There was something both beautiful and a blessing that he should pass on the day that we were to celebrate the Triumph of Christ's Cross.

During my last visit with him, before he was helped to return to his family in Goa, he told me of the Cross he was bearing with Jesus: the illness, the pain of the cancer and the discomfort. Before I left him, I said my final goodbye, and he asked for a blessing.

I prayed over him, asking God that Francisco would be granted all the strength he needed as he faced his last stage of his journey on this earth. I then said to him, "Let us pray for one another and so that we will see each other in heaven".

Francisco answered, "This is our faith, and it is what I believe".

I left this man of faith, for whom the Cross was being redemptive, and that he would triumph because of the faith, the gift of his own Baptism, that had grown within him.