



Easter 2020

Homily

**By the Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB
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**Saturday 11 April 2020 and Sunday 12 April at
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

On that dreadful Friday afternoon in Jerusalem just over 2000 years ago, so the Gospels tell us, as Jesus died the sun was eclipsed and darkness descended over the whole land. That darkness had already descended over most of the disciples of Jesus. Judas betrayed Jesus for money and then took his own life. The gospel tells us that he was a thief even though there have been many attempts over time to recast him as a disillusioned hero. Peter, one of the closest and most trusted of the disciples, betrayed Jesus, denying that he had ever known him. With one exception all the other disciples deserted Jesus in His hour of need and ran away in fear. The horror of Good Friday unmasked the sorry truth about these disciples.

There were exceptions, of course. There was the beloved disciple, the one whom the gospel tells us Jesus loved very deeply, who remained close to Jesus in His agony, standing at the foot of the cross as Jesus died. He was there with Mary, the mother of Jesus, the one often called the first and best disciple, whose courage and fidelity is thrown into sharp contrast by the cowardice and betrayal of so many of Jesus other disciples. The long story of Christian art has often focused on this mother's agonising love, as she cradles the dead body of her Son in her arms.

We see both the best and the worst of the disciples in that terrible story of Good Friday. The darkness and despair of that afternoon overpowered most of the disciples, but could not extinguish the light of faith and love which burned in the hearts of Mary, of the beloved disciple, and in others who looked on from afar but who did not run away.

In the present crisis through which we are all living, we are seeing the best and the worst in our society and perhaps in ourselves. The empty shelves in our shops, at least initially stripped of the necessities of life by those who had been determined to look out for themselves with little thought for others whose need was equally great, speaks of careless disregard for others. It is in sharp contrast with the extraordinary courage of those working in our hospitals and other health facilities, putting their own lives at risk in order to care for the sick. The attitude of those carelessly flouting the social distancing rules is unmasked by the countless examples of good humour, common sense and quiet acceptance by the vast majority who see the restrictions as the best way to care for themselves, their families and our wider society.

What the Easter story reminds us, however, is that the world cannot be simply divided into two camps: the wonderfully good and the irredeemably bad. The Christian tradition tells us that, with the stark exception of Judas, every one of those first disciples, and many others besides,



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eventually became courageous followers of and witnesses to Jesus, even to the point of death. Peter, for example, the great denier of Jesus, is crucified upside down in Rome because of his fearless leadership of the Church, and is buried in a pagan cemetery outside the city. Over his grave, on the Vatican Hill, would rise Saint Peter's Basilica.

What can change us from people driven by the worst of our instincts into people in whom the very best within us begins to come to its full flowering? It will be the very same thing which transformed those first disciples: the belief, the absolute conviction, that fear and selfishness will always be defeated by courage and large-hearted generosity; that love for others and for God will always provide a more solid foundation for our lives than mere self-interest. And ultimately, that life itself is more powerful than death and that death, in fact, is powerless in the face of the life which comes from God.

This is what the resurrection of Jesus means. It is not a fairy story or an impossible dream. It is real, it is true, and it is the source of the Church's hope, of our hope, even and perhaps especially in the face of the present world crisis enveloping us. But, if I may say this, it is a hope that springs from a conviction which lives both in our heads and in our hearts. The resurrection of Jesus is not simply an event from the past. It is a present reality. It is not simply something "out there" which we can observe from a distance. It is "in here", in my heart, in our hearts, in the heart of the Church. It was because the disciples knew that Jesus had risen from the dead – the gospels tell us that they ate and drank with Him after His resurrection – that the worst in them was overcome by the best in them.

On the morning of the resurrection Saint Luke's gospel tells us that two men in brilliant clothes said to the women who had come to the tomb, "*Why look among the dead for someone who is alive? Jesus is not here: He has risen*". On this Easter Day may these words sink into our hearts so that the power of the Risen Lord may overwhelm the worst in us, unleash the best in us, and enable us all to live these days of challenge with trusting faith in God for, as Saint Paul reminds us in his Letter to the Romans, "*neither death nor life, no angel, no prince, nothing that exists, nothing still to come, not any power, or height or depth, nor any created thing, can ever come between us and the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord*".