



## Easter Message 2020

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Archbishop of Perth**

Dear brothers and sisters,

Once again, the great celebrations of our Christian faith have arrived. In this holy week we remember the final days of Jesus' life, when His love for us is shown in such a powerful and uncompromising way as He is lifted up on the cross. The indestructible power of that love is confirmed when Jesus rises from the dead. And because of this the words of Jesus, which He spoke so often during his life and which were His first words to the women at the tomb on the day of His resurrection, are words which speak directly to us: *Do not be afraid.*

These are words which we need to hear from the Lord every day, but at this time of crisis they take on a new significance and become powerful words of hope as the fear and confusion generated by the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the world.

Pope Francis recently reflected on this fear and distress when, in a dark, deserted and rain-swept Saint Peter's Square in Rome, he led a prayer service in which he spoke of the *"thick darkness (which) has gathered over our squares, our streets and our cities; it has taken over our lives, filling everything with a deafening silence and a distressing void, that stops everything as it passes by; we feel it in the air, we notice it in people's gestures, their glances give them away. We find ourselves afraid and lost"*.

In these words the Pope gives expression to what is surely an almost universal human experience in these days. We do, indeed, feel "afraid and lost". So many of the things, big and small, which give structure to our daily lives, have been taken away from us. We don't know when, or in some cases even if, they will be returned to us.

The Easter story tells of a very similar and equally terrifying experience. The first followers of Jesus, who had placed all their hopes in Him, had the very ground pulled out from under them as they saw Jesus arrested, tortured and killed. On the day after that first Good Friday, there was for them, *"a deafening silence and a distressing void"*. It wasn't just the loss of Jesus, agonising though that was. It was the loss of hope and loss of faith. Jesus had told them of a God who was unbelievably compassionate, merciful and loving. This was a God to believe in and to love. But where was that God when Jesus needed him most? The disciples could only conclude that Jesus must have been wrong. It really was too good to be true after all.

And then Jesus rises from death to new life. Easter Sunday is God's answer to the despair of those first followers of Jesus and it is God's answer to the deafening silence and distressing void



which fills our lives now. The God revealed in Jesus is not a god who waves a magic wand and takes away all pain and suffering. The God of Jesus comes to meet us, as Jesus did so often during His life, to be with us in our distress, our suffering and our confusion in order to lead us, if we let Him, to a new and richer life.

*If we let Him* - this is the promise and the challenge of Easter. It is the gift which God holds out to everyone: the gift, perhaps, which is hidden in the confusion of these dark days. It is true that we will not be able to gather together as communities of faith to celebrate this holiest of weeks. It is true that the chance to receive the Lord's Body and Blood when we celebrate the Eucharist is denied to us. It is true that on Easter Sunday we are not even able to be with our extended family and friends and celebrate the Lord's resurrection with joy around the Easter table. But it is not true that the Lord has abandoned us, just as it was not true that He abandoned His first disciples. They had to learn to look for Him in new ways. They had to let Him surprise them, as he did for the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, by coming to them in ways they had not expected. It will be the same for us. And as we do meet Him in strange and unexpected ways, and learn to know Him more deeply than we do at present, we can look forward to the joy of coming together again around the Eucharistic table to share with our brothers and sisters all the ways in which our hearts burned within us because we had met Him along the winding road we are all travelling together.

And so, in the words of the risen Christ to his disciples, "Peace be with you". I wish you all a happy and hope-filled Easter, and one that is made a little easier because we know that we are all being supported by each other's prayer. May God bless you all.



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**Catholic Archbishop of Perth**