



2022 EASTER MESSAGE

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As we celebrate the great Easter mystery in this year 2022, I find myself reflecting, as I am sure many of you do, on the enormous challenges facing both the Church and our society at this time.

The year has started once again with significant tragedy and hardship. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to present both the Church and our society with many challenges, while the devastating floods in Queensland and New South Wales are testing people's resilience and the capacity of our communities and our governments to respond adequately and promptly. And, of course, even more alarming and disturbing, is the horror of the conflict in Ukraine.

As Christians, one of our instinctive, and very sound, responses, is to turn to God in prayer. We are disciples of the one who told us to ask, to seek and to knock, believing that in doing so God would respond (cf Matt 7:7). We have been, are, and will continue to be people of prayer for the needs of our world, whether that world be our family, our neighborhood, our fellow Australians or people we have never met on the other side of the world. It is central to our faith that we know ourselves to be part of the human family, brothers and sisters together, with the one God as Father of us all.

Our prayer is modelled on that of Jesus, and our experience of God's response to our prayer will mirror that of Jesus. In the Lord's Prayer Jesus taught us to call God our Father, to seek His kingdom, to ask for our daily needs, to give and receive forgiveness, and to pray to be saved from the power of the Evil One (cf Matt 6:9-13). The mystery of prayer, of course, is that at times God seems silent. The suffering and sorrow from which we seek relief still dominates our lives; it can feel as if God is not listening. This was certainly the experience of Jesus as He faced the horror of His own passion and death. In the Garden of Gethsemane, He prayed that the cup of suffering might be taken away from Him, but He also prayed that it would be His Father's will, and not His own, that might prevail (Matt 26:39). The cup of suffering was not taken away; Jesus had to drink it to its dregs, but it was not because the Father was cruel and wanted Him to die. It was because Jesus was the victim of the cruelty, hard-heartedness and insane jealousy of those who opposed Him. The Father did not intervene to cancel the inevitable consequences of this hard-heartedness - the price of human freedom can be high when that freedom is willfully misused - but nor did the Father desert Jesus, even though as He was dying on the cross Jesus cried out in agony, "*My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?*" (Matt 27:46). The agony of Jesus is being repeated in His suffering people here in Australia, in Ukraine, and in many other tormented parts of the



world. The agony of Jesus and His cry of abandonment point to His humanity, and this is true of all those who are suffering. We suffer because we are human beings who live in a broken and fragmented world. But Jesus on the point of death also prayed with trusting faith, *“Father, into your hands I commend my spirit”* (Luke 23:46).

Echoing the constant teaching of our Catholic tradition, Pope Francis has often reminded us that faith does not spare us the burdens and sufferings of life. What faith can do is enable us to bear these painful realities, sometimes with great difficulty, in union with Christ. What we cannot do alone we can hope to be able to accomplish if we cling to Him.

This is the powerful message of Saint Paul who, having met the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, was able to cry out with confidence, *“I am certain of this: 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”* (Rom 8:38).

Saint Paul is reminding us that nothing about our faith makes sense if Jesus is not at the centre. It is He who can give us the courage to face all our challenges, because He draws us into communion with Him so that we share in His courage and face our difficulties with Him beside us. It is this same communion with Jesus which enables us to be the instruments of healing, of hope and of new beginnings which we, our families, our communities, our country and our world so desperately need. Saint Paul can come to help us here too. His beautiful profession of faith – *I no longer live for it is Christ who lives in me* (Galatians 2:20) is not simply poetic language: it expresses a concrete, down-to-earth reality for those who are prepared to take their Christian faith seriously. And when Christ really lives in us, the qualities which made Jesus so attractive and compelling will shine through our own lives. As they do, more and more, we will become powerful signs and bearers of God’s compassion, healing and mercy.

For us as Christians, this is not an “impossible dream”. Because of the resurrection of Christ, we know that He is now present to us, ready to share everything He has – His simplicity and compassion, His forgiveness and humility, His self-forgetfulness and of course His intimate communion with His Father – with us. This is the gift of life He promises us. It is the gift we celebrate at Easter.

May this invitation find an echo in your hearts as you celebrate Easter this year. And may the Lord’s Easter gift of peace bring joy to you, your families and all those you love.

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