



Easter Message 2024

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Dear Friends,

When I was a young boy first learning about my faith both at home and at school, there was an unmistakable stress on the horror of sin, on how deeply offended God was by sin, and on the dreadful consequences of failing to turn away from sin and repent of the evil things we had done.

While in my case this was balanced by an equally strong emphasis on the love and compassion of God, it seems that many people of my generation only really heard the first part of the message. Inevitably, this led to an understanding of faith based primarily on fear. This in turn led to an image of an angry God who demanded retribution for the offences committed against Him.

Sin is a dreadful thing, which leads us away from God and from those we love. It closes us in on ourselves and leads us to make the satisfaction of our own desires the decisive criterion of our decisions and of our lives. It leads us to think that we will be happy when we get what we want, no matter the cost to others or even, ultimately, to ourselves.

God, whom the Bible tells us created us in the divine image, cannot be content with this – but perhaps God's discontent is not born of anger but of profound sorrow as God sees us do such damage to ourselves and to others.

Saint John's Gospel hints of this when it tells us that *"God loved the world so much that he gave His only Son.....not to condemn the world but so that through Him the world might be saved."* (John 3:16-17). In the mind of God, it seems, we need saving from ourselves and, often, also from each other.

"God loved the world....". This, rather than God's anger, is at the heart of the gospel message and at the heart of the life and ministry of Jesus. At the Last Supper Jesus confirmed this for us when He said to His disciples, *"This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you."* (John 15:12). This way of love, the way that we are called to follow, comes to its



highest expression when Jesus goes to the cross. Jesus gave everything – He held nothing back – out of love for us. And now, incredibly, He invites us to walk the same path of love, not just for ourselves but for the good of others.

The Lord is not speaking of a superficial love or a love that melts away when difficulties and challenges come. He is speaking of a love which, as Saint Paul reminds us, *“is patient and kind, is never jealous, never boastful or conceited, never rude or selfish, does not take offence and is not resentful”*. It is a love, Paul goes on to insist, which *“takes no pleasure in other people’s sins, delights in the truth, is always ready to excuse, to trust, to hope and to endure whatever comes.”* (1 Cor:13:4-7).

After the journey of Lent this year, during which we have had an opportunity to reflect more deeply on what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, it is important we recognise that this call to *“love as Jesus did”* is the very heart of our faith and of our discipleship. Each one of us knows how difficult it can be to live this call to love with constancy and fidelity, but each one of us, in the depths of our heart, will also recognise that this is exactly what Jesus meant when He described Himself as the Way, and the Truth and the Life. His way is the way to true happiness and the fulness of life: that is why we follow Him.

Easter is a time when we are called to recognise once again the seeds of hope which lie in this call to love. It is true that we can easily be overwhelmed when we see the horrors which continue to unfold in Ukraine, in the Middle East, in Sudan, in Myanmar and in so many other places around the world. We can shake our heads in desperation as we encounter more and more homeless people living on the streets with no apparent solution in sight. We can fear for the future when we read stories of increasing violence in our schools, both secondary and primary. In the face of all these problems we can feel helpless. But the triumph of Jesus over the powers of hatred and evil is a powerful antidote to this. It is the promise of a new and better way to live. It is a source of hope and equally a call to action. If we, as members of the Catholic community and the wider Christian community in our society, committed ourselves to taking the gospel of Jesus seriously and set ourselves to walk in His Way, to embrace His Truth, and live His Life, we would be a powerful force not only for good, but for transformation and renewal in our wider community.

Of course, we cannot do this on our own. We need to be a people of hope, not just individuals with hope; we need to be a community of service, generosity and practical assistance to those in need, not just individuals who do their best to help where they can; we need to be a communion of forgiveness and healing, welcome and hospitality, and not just individuals who try their best without the support of others.

“There are three things that endure”, says Saint Paul, *“faith, hope and love; and the greatest of these is love”* (1Cor 13:13). If we can, with God’s grace, create true communities of love, that



generous, outward-reaching, self-sacrificing love which marked the life of Jesus, then the hope of Easter, the hope of love's triumph over hate and life's triumph over death, can begin to be realised.

Dear friends, this Easter, I invite you to remember that Jesus Christ, risen from the dead and alive with us, is at the heart of Easter, just as he is at the heart of the Church, and of every aspect of the Church's life.

He calls to us and asks us to make room for Him so that He can be the companion on our journey, enabling us by His presence among us to love as He did.

I invite each and every one of you to open your hearts to Him, let Him be the way you follow, the truth you believe and the life you live - and do not be afraid, for He loves us with an everlasting love.

May you all have a Happy and Holy Easter.

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