

HOLY SATURDAY & EASTER SUNDAY ESSENDON 2021
JESUS LIVES

Mk 16.1-8 Gen 1 Ex 14 Is 55 Ez 36 Rom 6.3-11 / AA 10.34-43 1Cor 5.6-8
(Rhyme Bible for Easter Sunday Masses – “Jesus is Alive”

Welcome to our Easter Vigil here at St Therese’s, but still with prescribed restrictions and precautions. Unfortunately, on Good Friday afternoon, some who came, expecting admission, were quite unreasonable and a few, unpleasant, towards those checking at the door, about not being admitted because we were booked out beforehand. We are required by law to apply the 2 square metre per person rule, for as long as restrictions continue.

Here we are in autumn 2021, and we’ve had just about our third or fourth straight summer day, to help brighten up our Holy Week and Easter celebrations, after a very patchy and unpredictable summer here in Melbourne.

Easter season is upon us, and we approach it with a sense of enthusiasm and joy, helped by the fact that there is a holiday break from school, and that we can once again get back into church to worship together as a community. Last Easter Sunday 2020 was very strange for me, and for you, I guess, with the church closed and no liturgical celebrations for the most important week of the Catholic calendar, in the leadup to Easter. For me, in 42 years as a priest, I had never had a quiet Easter at home, even feeling guilty for having nothing to do! I had recorded an Easter Mass for the parish website on Saturday, but Easter Sunday was a time for silent reflection, playing the piano, doing a jigsaw and reading. In the end, I didn’t mind the idea or the experience, but it was certainly different! I could have got used to the idea in some ways – semi-retirement come early!! There was also a real sense of fear of the unknown, with uncertainty about coronavirus and its consequences.

Don’t we know that the themes of Holy Week are many and varied, as we move from the happy welcome to Jesus in Jerusalem by the crowds, and anticipation of the Passion, this year from Mark, to the overshadowing sense of impending doom, as Judas connives with the Temple Police on Spy Wednesday, Jesus farewells his inner circle on Holy Thursday, with the combination of the breaking of the bread and the washing of the feet, and the command to continue to do this in his memory, which is why we are here now, doing just that.

Then there is the turnaround of the evil gross injustice and tragedy of ironically named Good Friday, with the apostles fading into the background darkness, highlighted by Peter’s denial and Judas’s treachery, reflecting the heart of human weakness. But then again, I like to say, it reminds you and me too, that there is always hope of forgiveness and redemption, for another chance to do better ourselves.

Now we have the conclusion of Mark’s Gospel, where it ends suddenly and sombrely, as the faithful women run off afraid, having first encountered the empty tomb and the man in white. Some commentators suggest this is an echo of the man who ran off naked in Mark’s account of Jesus’ arrest, his white robe now symbolic of the garment of faith in the Risen Jesus.

It’s hardly surprising that the women react in shock and disbelief at first, as there’s nothing normal or natural about their experience. It takes time for the message to sink in, that Jesus has not been contained by the tomb, nor by death, and that he has risen and lives on, as his message of love, peace and hope, continues to resound down through the ages ever since. But they take their time in coming to terms with what has happened and so in finally coming to faith that his presence endures.

A later ending to Mark’s Gospel has been added, to soften the blow and recount some of the early appearances of the Risen Jesus, but the original ending is to leave it to us, to take the step forward in faith, to realize and accept his ongoing presence in our lives and our world to this day.

Andrew Hamilton SJ, whom I quoted on Good Friday, moves on to the hope and joy of Easter, calling for prayer for those caught up in the ongoing struggle for justice and love in our troubled world: *“On Good Friday expediency, brutality and military efficiency at killing had the last word. That is the day to which so many of our sisters and brothers throughout the world are confined today. But 3 days later the sun rose, and with it rose life and love. They mock the claim of death and despair, anger and hatred, to have the final word in our*

world or in our hearts. The last word is given to love, to remembrance, to justice and to reconciliation.” We keep trying and persevering in our own way, to make a positive difference.

Yet, Easter does not solve all of our problems or make this a better world, without you and me responding to the Gospel call to live the Easter message, reflecting his ongoing presence in our lives through the people that we are, facing our own crosses, helping to lift the crosses of others, and being agents of his love in our world.

Just yesterday, I came across a lovely poem titled *Focus on Love*, which reflects on the spirit of this season we celebrate together in faith; *God spreads her love around as the sun kisses the day with autumnal warmth. Apt since this Friday is called Good; not because of the suffering nor the death since we still have plenty of both. Instead we ought to focus on the love of God for the world and each of its inhabitants. This act of love and integrity. This act of love that spoke the truth to power. This act of love that did not resist violence. This act of love whose seeds give birth to light, liberation, wholeness.* And so we move from the darkness to Easter light and joy.

If we believe the Easter proclamation *“He is Risen – Jesus lives”*, then we have to follow through, in applying it, in love, to who we are, as his faithful, if flawed, followers in this broken, but wonderful, world he has given us in which to live and thrive, more than survive.

For my Easter story this year: *“The Lion Who Wanted to Love”* by Gilles Andreae. The most unlikely, young Leo the little lion, comes out on top, determined to be different and show his love and care for all. And so is the task ours, to live as People of God with Easter joy, in hope and love.

And yes, there are the symbols of Easter celebration and enjoyment in the Easter eggs, bilbies, bunnies, hot cross buns and Mothers’ Day in May is coming next, the promoters tell us!! Don’t overdo the chocolate!

A Happy, healthy, joyful and safe Easter to all. Joyeuses Paques, Buona Pasqua, Felices Pascuas, Frohe Ostern, Vesila Velikonoce, Sretan Uskrs, Christos Anesti.

john hannon

3rd April 2021