

Bishop Swarbrick's Homily at Easter Vigil Mass



My Dear brothers and sisters in the Risen Lord,

Our Faith is based on the fact of Christ's resurrection from the dead. It is not an ideal to be aimed at or lived by. It is a reality to be shared. Jesus is risen from the tomb.

The Israelites escaped slavery and found themselves free. That was their good news. The not so good news was that they were on the edge of a mighty wilderness and their promised land lay on the far side of it. Becoming free was only part of the story. And think of the miracles and works of Jesus. The lepers were healed but what would they do with their new health? The blind man was able to see but how would he use this gift? Lazarus was raised from the dead but how long would it be before he and his sisters, Martha and Mary, had to go through it all again? The Samaritan woman Jesus had talked with at the well was still making her daily visits to draw water for the family.

What difference does this make in their lives and in ours?

Jesus is risen, but Notre Dame is still a charred, burnt-out shell of a Cathedral. The riddle of Brexit still has to be 'solved' and the lives of so many still hang in limbo. Alex must still under-go treatment for his cancer. Anne must still watch her parents growing old. Kieran must still find work and pay his rent, and mend his relationship with his girl-friend. Difficult things don't suddenly go away. I don't wish to pour cold water on Easter, just trying to help us get inside it.

We are invited to find ourselves in these stories, or even better, find something of these stories inside us. They are about us. Ultimately, the Sacred Scriptures tell only one story, the story of love between God and us. It's a story that has two sides like any love story, two ways in; the human and the Divine. By nature, we are best able to see it, hear it and find our way into it from our side, that of created human life, the back door as it were. But because the Son of God became the Son of Mary we can also enter to some degree through the front

door, the Divine, and see how much God has loved us. We don't need to guess. Just look for the evidence.

In any true love relationship, a key element to making it work is the ability to see and understand the heart of the one you love. Minus that, it will always be missing something essential. It won't work. Whenever I've celebrated weddings it was always clear that the couple went to great lengths and cost to look their best for each other. That's what you want for the one you love, to be your best. In the real world we know we can't always achieve that standard every day of a marriage. The beauty of true love, divine love, is that here we have found someone who loves us when we are not at our best, far from it in fact. Once I realise that, it's not an excuse to behave badly and expect to get away with it. It is a reason to be deep down happy. It is a measure of how much we are loved.

Our faith in Jesus isn't based on using Him to get what we want. Our belief in the resurrection isn't about knowing that He will always clean up our messes. Rather it is about discovering the heart of the God who loves us and wishes to honour us. The God who wants us to share His life.

Good Friday wasn't our best day. We messed up big time. And then it was too late. We realised too late what we'd done, whom we'd hurt. Now we'd just have to live with it. It was ruined.

Then came this On the first day of the week, at the first sign of dawn, the women went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away. They entered, but found that the body of Jesus was not there.

The story is not over. That love has not died. Now I know it better than ever. Now I need it more than ever. The power of sin has been broken. The tomb was empty. He is not there. Jesus is risen. So where is He? He's coming to greet you, with a love for you that refuses to die.

+Paul Swainson

+Paul

Bishop of Lancaster



The Catholic Diocese of Lancaster