



National Council of Churches in Australia

Monday, 29 March 2010

from the National Council of Churches in Australia

Easter 2010 Messages from Australian Church Leaders

This week will see millions of Christians around the world celebrating the same date for Easter by attending church and again reflecting upon the meaning of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

What does Easter mean for us in Australia? Is it just another long weekend or is it more than that? For some it may just be another day but for others it does have a special significance, even if only for the chocolate. This Easter weekend will once again see many attending local churches searching for a deeper meaning.

Easter reminds us that God is no stranger to suffering and pain. Easter reminds us that God is not just watching from a distance. God comes near to us in Jesus Christ, the one born in a manger in Bethlehem, schooled in the ways of the world in Nazareth and spent three years actively showing people God's mercy and compassion.

Today, Easter carries the same message of hope and courage that it did when Jesus was crucified – a message that God can overcome the injustices in the world giving strength and courage enabling us to face each day. Many in our community are weighed down by escalating financial commitments, stress and health conditions. In the presence of tough times we face an uncertain future. Easter shows us that even the grave is not the end. There is hope of new life beyond death. Hope that rests in God, who raised Jesus from the dead, can also raise each one of us above whatever it is that weighs us down. God in Christ can make even the darkest day look bright.

May the peace of Christ surround all this Easter.

*Reverend Tara Curlewis, General Secretary
National Council of Churches in Australia*

(NB. In 2010 both Western and Eastern rite Christians will celebrate Easter on the 4th of April.)

Anglican Church of Australia

In recent weeks torrential rain hit western Queensland causing widespread flooding. Even people who have lived through previous floods in the region were shocked by the speed at which water levels rose and at the velocity of the flood waters.

Extensive damage was caused to houses and business premises. Fast flowing water flattened fences and tore up roads. Surging water washed away dam walls so in places water could not even be captured for future use. There were stock losses, too. Sheep, cattle and horses drowned in the torrents. Silage stores were destroyed along with hay and wheat stockpiles.

Flood water is dirty coating everything it touches with mud and casting debris and rubbish far and wide. It fills drains and sewers and becomes contaminated with water-borne

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Assyrian Church
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Uniting Church

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diseases. Small cuts and scratches that came into contact with flood water have led to serious sickness and hospitalization. Ross River Fever is expected to follow the floods.

Two weeks after the deluge anxiety is growing among the people about whether insurance companies will compensate them for losses. Assessors were still to visit many places and technical legal arguments about the differences between storm, flood, flash flood, deluge and inundation were generating anger, frustration and disillusionment.

Though the loss and grief are all too real, they are not the full story. The massive rains have given birth to a tangible sense of hope in these towns. There is lush green grass as far as the eye can see and water supplies have been abundantly replenished after a decade of drought. So despite the damage spirits are high. New life is emerging from destruction.

The natural world is rebounding with abundant vitality. But so too are new life and hope being born from the sacrificial service of men and women who in so many ways lay down their lives for their friends. The reality and truth of Easter are being unveiled before our very eyes in these towns. Life has overcome death. Christ is risen.

*The Most Rev'd Dr Phillip Aspinall, Primate
Anglican Church of Australia*

Armenian Apostolic Church

The life of a Christian is no guarantee of a life without struggle. Living for God often brings on hardship, but with it comes the opportunity to tell the good news of salvation. Let this message be reflective in our hearts and minds at Easter.

In the Gospel of Matthew we read how Jesus prepared His disciples for persecution. “*Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.*” (Matthew 10:34) Our sword is Christ Himself and His Word is the armour which shields us.

As we approach Holy Week to recount the tumultuous events that culminate in the Glorious Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ, we can be reassured that when facing opposition, hostility and persecution our only hope is to look to the Shepherd for protection.

Jesus told his disciples to take courage in spite of the inevitable struggles they would face as they would not be alone. Jesus does not abandon us to our struggles either. If we remember that the ultimate victory has already been won, that Jesus has “*overcome the world*” (John 16:33), then we can claim the peace of Christ in the most troublesome times.

“Blessed is the Resurrection of Christ.”

*Archbishop Aghan Baliozian, Primate
Diocese of the Armenian Church of Australia and New Zealand*

Catholic Church in Australia

One of the great joys of our Catholic life is the renewal of our baptismal promise on Easter Sunday. As a nation we have special reason to be joyous this Easter with the impending canonisation of Blessed Mary MacKillop. Mary’s own story is a shining example of how her understanding of Our Lord’s suffering, death and resurrection helped her to overcome adversity and serve God in a way that helped and inspired others.

The message of hope that Easter brings is particularly important in view of the devastating effects of the earthquakes in Haiti and Chile. While some people look at such shocking events and wonder how God can let them happen, our faith helps us to understand that Jesus is the answer to our suffering – he is the gift that God has given us so that we can turn to him and know that he will come to our aid.

God does not create suffering or danger or difficulty in the world but God was the one who sent Jesus into the world and he shared everything with us, including death. And so even in the emptiness of death we find him waiting for us, welcoming us and helping us, as he does every day of our lives.

As we do all that we can to respond to the needs of the people of Haiti and Chile and remember them in our prayers, we also commend them to the care of our Lord. Similarly, in our own lives we can turn to our Lord and depend on him. During the Easter celebrations, we vividly recall how he came to save us by showing us how to love our neighbour and, through the ultimate sacrifice of his death and resurrection, provided us with the light that shines in the darkness calling us to show the same love for one another.

*Archbishop Philip Wilson, President
Australian Catholic Bishops Conference*

Churches of Christ in Australia

Remembering Jesus

Mary Magdalene followed Jesus on a journey of hope, restoration and compassion. She has witnessed his love for humanity, his love for God, his love for the outcast and the forgotten. In the space of 72 hours, she witnessed the depths to which humanity can go: a humanity that can arrest, beat, torture and crucify a man of faith. She stands outside an empty tomb, bereft of hope. Someone has stolen the body of Jesus, and Mary's hope.

Yet the one she mourns stands along side her: *At this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realise it was Jesus.* (John 20:14)

Without hope, planets degrade into toxic greenhouses; children needlessly starve; the issues surrounding Indigenous communities, of those seeking refuge, and the poor will remain unvoiced. We will focus on despair, and not recognise the hope that stands before us.

Jesus said to her, "Mary." (John 20:16).

At Easter, Jesus reminds us that despite crushing circumstances, he has not disappeared. He calls his church to remember that we are to be givers of hope, to resurrect hope when it has been entombed.

To give hope to those for whom the simple act of living has become burdensome.

To give hope those who feel that climate change has been buried in political processes and conflicting reports.

To give hope to those who feel marginalized by governments and culture.

To give hope to those who have landed on our shores, escaping war, terror and despair.

Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" (John 20:18)

Through Jesus, hope is eternal.

*Craig Brown, Federal Coordinator
Churches of Christ in Australia*

Coptic Orthodox Church

Diocese of NSW, Qld & NT

We rejoice as we celebrate the Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The culture of death, which is prevalent in the world today, is exemplified in violence and terrorism, the increase of the suicide rate, the increase in the number of divorce, abortion, euthanasia and others, are all an expression of the culture of despair resulting from being away from the source of true hope, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Hope of us all.

Let us rejoice, because Christ has granted us hope by His resurrection, for "the things which are impossible with men are possible with God." (Luke 18:27).

May the light of the Risen Christ fill your hearts, homes and our Australian society with peace and tranquility.

May the Risen Christ bless Australia, its people and its Government.

Bishop Daniel

With the Grace of God

Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of NSW, QLD & NT

Diocese of Melbourne and Affiliated Regions

A very clear message that we receive through the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is that of power. As Christians we view power in a completely different way than the world does. The world may think that the powerful person is the one who is strong physically, or the person who is very wealthy, or the person or country that dominates and oppresses others. Some may also think that relying on oneself and intelligence is their source of power.

If we want to learn the true meaning of power we need to realise what Saint Paul visualised by saying about Christ, "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection." (Philippians 3:10) The resurrection grants us power for many things, and without it our faith is meaningless. Saint Paul says, "And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!" (1 Corinthians 15:17)

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ grants us spiritual power from above that cannot be achieved except through faith in the Lord and in His resurrection. This becomes clear to us when we compare the lives of the disciples of Christ before and after the resurrection. During the trial and crucifixion of Christ we see the disciples in a state of weakness and fear. Saint Luke says that, "they were terrified and frightened..." (Luke 24:37) Yet after the resurrection a complete transformation takes place. This great power and courage that entered into the disciples is proof of the resurrection of Christ.

The disciples were able to stand up in front of kings and rulers with great boldness and courage and to preach with power, the resurrection and the message of salvation that Christ gave to the world. It would have been impossible that the disciples could have persisted in affirming the truths they had narrated, had not the Lord Jesus actually risen from the dead, and had they not known this fact as certainly as they knew any other fact. The pure lives of the disciples, their ethical teaching, the quality of their lives, their steadfastness in suffering and persecution all point to the power of the resurrection of Christ and how it impacted positively on the disciple's lives.

The resurrection grants power to overcome sin and weakness. The Lord warns us by saying, "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) When Satan comes to tempt us to follow after the vanity of this world we can

look to the triumphant Christ and say with Saint Paul, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13) Saint Paul also exhorts us saying, "be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." (Ephesians 6:10) Christ completes and perfects our weakness as He says; "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:9) Saint Athanasius the Apostolic teaches us saying, "In truth, the Pascha is abstinence from evil, the practice of virtue, and a transition from death to life. It is this which one learns from the ancient type: for then they labored to pass from Egypt to Jerusalem; now we pass from death to life; then, from Pharaoh to Moses; now, from the devil to the Saviour."

On this solemn occasion we also remember our new martyrs of Nag Hammadi, Egypt, who shed their blood on 6 January 2010 and died for the sake of Christ. Today they are rejoicing with the risen Lord and cry out saying, "Christ is risen! Indeed He is risen!"

Bishop Suriel

Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Melbourne and Affiliated Regions

Greek Orthodox Church

This year we had the pleasure of celebrating the triumph of Pascha together - that is, at the same time - with Christians of the West. And we recognize how much **easier** the simultaneous celebration is for the daily lives of working people, especially where there are **minorities** of faithful from various denominations.

We are called once more to continue with endurance our strenuous journey between the harsh 'Symplegades' of recent times, keeping our **spirit of the Resurrection** upright, no matter to what extent the **darkness** of the present world may alarm us.

Yet, even in times of **various impasses**, such as today, the Cross of Christ, who Suffered and Rose for all people, is able to transform the **most tragic** circumstances of the world into a 'Resurrectional mobilisation' of those who pray. Provided that we firmly remain **believing, hoping and loving** in the name of the only God-Man, who reconciled us forever with our Creator God, elevating us from children of '**wrath**' into children of '**adoption**'.

To Him be all **glory** and **veneration** unto the ages.

Archbishop Stylianos, Primate

Greek Orthodox Church in Australia

Lutheran Church of Australia

How would we feel if we had been among the followers of Jesus of Nazareth, walking around in dusty sandals, listening to his every word and daring to hope that at last there would be answers to the many questions of life and then with our expectations high, he is crucified as a criminal?

Dashed hopes are cruel. To hope is to live. But hope cannot be conjured up psychologically if it is to be of lasting value.

That first Good Friday must have been a dark day of spiritual depression for those who had hoped God himself had been actually touching them.

Little wonder that Mary Magdalene, one of those who went to the tomb early on the Sunday morning, we now celebrate as Easter, did not recognize the risen Lord Jesus Christ until he called her by name. Who could possibly have expected that? Rather than avoid death this Jesus had broken its power. While he had predicted it, he had not been understood.

Now for us too Easter means hope. We can now be victors in life rather than victims of life.

Rev'd Dr Michael P Semmler, President

Lutheran Church of Australia

Romanian Orthodox Church

My dear Brothers and Sisters in the Risen Lord,

***“Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death
and upon those in the graves, bestowing life.”***

We greet you with this glorious and joyous Paschal troparion now when our entire being is renewed and awoken to life by the Resurrection of the Life Giver, Christ our Lord. In the Orthodox Church we sing this short yet very powerful hymn at every liturgical service from the night of the Resurrection until the Feast of Ascension, actualizing the reality of the Feast of Pascha and proclaiming it with loud voices and joyful hearts to the whole creation.

For us, the believers in Christ, the Resurrection must be a reality and not a myth or story. It is a presence of being, a state of existence rather than a simple event which we remember every year. The Resurrection of Christ, as the above mentioned troparion proclaims, is life giving and source of renewal for all believers. Christ in his full humanity and full divinity died for our sins to once and for all restore that bond that was once lost between us and God. Through His Resurrection from the death, He annihilated the power of sin and death over those who believe in Him, granting us eternal life with Him and making us once again, “citizens of the Kingdom.” Christ’s Resurrection then becomes our Resurrection and renewal from the power of death and sin, we are no longer subjugated to death if we live constantly in the light and presence of the Resurrection.

We pray that the Risen Lord may grant to all of us love for what is good and holy in this life so that living with Him in our hearts we may not perish and have eternal life. We wish you a Blessed Easter with peace and joy in your communities and families filled with faith and love for the Risen Lord!

Christ is Risen! Truly, He is Risen!

Bishop Mihail

Romanian Orthodox Diocese of Australia and New Zealand

The Salvation Army

Recently a young Indigenous Australian whose troubled life had led him into drugs and crime met one of our Indigenous workers. She introduced him to the alive Jesus Christ, and the impact on him has been remarkable. His life has completely turned around. He said, ‘I have taken off my clothes of shame.’

The crucified, dead, but alive-again Christ, is the hope of all people. He is risen with the power to change lives. He has overcome the weaknesses and brokenness which grip the human race. He reigns as Lord, the one with authority to lead us. He is the infinite reference point to guide our lives, and the near at hand friend to heal us.

The Salvation Army celebrates his resurrection this Easter, in harmony with all Christians. And we tell out his story to everyone we can.

*Commissioner Linda Bond,
Territorial Commander
Australia Eastern Territory*

*Commissioner James Knaggs,
Territorial Commander
Australia Southern Territory*

Serbian Orthodox Church

Beloved, celebrating today together with the Holy Apostles Him who rose from the dead, we hear His comforting words: *Peace be to you!* (Jn 20:20). And with the Myrrh-Bearing Women, we repeat His invitation: *Rejoice!* (Matt. 28:9). Today our hearts are overflowing

with that same peace and that same joy! Christ is risen and truly *no one can take our joy from us* (Jn. 16:22); because in His Resurrection death has been abolished!

Otherwise, do we not see how the dark deeds of this world would triumph in our complete spiritual and physical devastation? Do we not see how much sin impedes upon our moral defeat? If we choose not to believe, we have only to ask ourselves: where is our youth? In our churches or are their lives overcome by the temptations of this world? Do we have youth and others who suffer from the illness of addiction or those who are incarcerated? This is for every parent the most painful experience of incarnate secularism!

Only a life in Christ presents the alternative to dissension and division, immorality and disfigurement, drugs and crime, corruption and all that is sin and bears death, both spiritual and physical. Therefore, despite all that comes to us from the Evil One, other persons and even more often from us ourselves; but because of everything that comes to us on Pascha from the Crucified and Risen Lord, let us rejoice and exult with the plenitude of Christ's Holy Church, always and from all our heart exclaiming:

CHRIST IS RISEN!

*Bishop Irinej
Bishop of Australia and New Zealand
The Serbian Orthodox Church*

Seventh-day Adventist Church

JESUS is the PROMISED ONE, the MESSIAH – God with us; our Redeemer!

The prophecy hundreds of years before Christ:

*But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned – everyone – to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all....
And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death,
although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Isaiah 53:5,6,9
(ESV)*

Jesus' own testimony:

*These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written
about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled...
that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,
and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations.
Luke 24:44,46,47 (ESV)*

An eye-witness testimony (Peter to Jews in Jerusalem):

*Jesus of Nazareth... this Jesus... you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men....
This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses....
God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you have crucified.
Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of
your sins... Acts 2:23,32,38 (ESV)*

*Pastor K L Vogel, General Secretary
Seventh-day Adventist Church*

Uniting Church in Australia

I've just arrived back from a Church leaders' delegation to Christmas Island Detention Centre where all asylum seekers arriving by boat are housed whilst awaiting refugee and security status checks. Many of them carry great anxiety not to mention the trauma that many have experienced before embarking on their journeys of hope.

It's a fascinating place to reflect on the Easter message. The asylum seekers inhabit a sort of 'Easter Saturday' space. Many of them have experienced darkness, persecution, death of family members and friends. All are sustained by the hope that new life awaits them in this country. In the meantime they exist in an anxious, fearful space.

Pray for the asylum seekers, for the staff of the Detention Centre and for our government to implement policies and practices that are humane and hopeful.

And may each of us turn to God for hope, strength, courage and joy - the God who in Jesus lived our human life, shared our suffering and who rose again to reassure us in the words of St Paul: 'I am certain there is nothing in life or in death, nothing in all of creation, that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord'.

*Rev Alistair Macrae, President
Uniting Church in Australia*

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