“Christ is risen and life is freed”

Easter Homily 2017

In the year 400AD the great and fearless bishop of Constantinople, John Chrysostom, said in his Easter homily,

O death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory? Christ is risen and you are abolished. Christ is risen and the demons are cast down. Christ is risen and the angels rejoice. Christ is risen and life is freed. Christ is risen and the tomb is emptied of the dead: for Christ, being risen from the dead, has become the Leader and Reviver of those who had fallen asleep. To Him be glory and power for ever and ever. Amen.

This homily is read in Orthodox churches each Easter. It captures the Christian exultation at the Resurrection of Christ. That Christ is risen changes everything.

This homily by one of the great Fathers of the Church is testimony to the meaning of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ for all Christians. It is testimony to the new vision of life that comes from the Christian faith. In Christ’s Resurrection all things are made right. Amidst the shadows and darkness of this world, amidst the evil of men, amidst the suffering of the innocent, amidst the ascendency of the falsehood, amidst the many powers that corrupt and disfigure human dignity, the victory has been won.

Despite all the misery, injustice, the monstrosities present on earth and portrayed vividly in our media, the Resurrection of Christ has already inaugurated the final order in the world. What we see with our own eyes may suggest otherwise, but in reality evil and death have been defeated forever. Their sources are dried up; the reality is that Jesus is the Lord of the world. The Prince of this world has been overthrown. Evil has been radically defeated and humanity is redeemed. The new world has already begun.

Of course all the signs available to the senses would declare otherwise. And evil will continue to manifest itself, but the course of history is set towards a final victory. It is a fundamental belief of Christians that evil will not triumph in the end. No matter how dark things may become Christ as Lord of History will bring all things to their rightful end.

My brothers and sisters we live in this new order. It is the order of redemption, the order of grace, of saving grace. We are sharers in the new life of Christ given to us at our baptism. We stand within but apart from the world around us. We are the children of the resurrection. We are already partakers of heavenly glory. We have received the promise and live with a radiant hope in our hearts.

My brothers and sisters on this Easter night/day let us look at our lives, our Church and our world in the light of the Risen Christ.

We are living in a period of history of the Catholic Church here in Tasmania that has changed significantly from the Catholic Church here fifty years ago. In the years following the Vatican Council and under the dynamic leadership of Archbishop Guilford Young the Church was strong, united and confident. The Church here embraced the Council directives with an assurance that a new and vibrant era for the Church was unfolding.

Now, fifty years on, we are beset by the most serious of challenges. At the centre of the challenges is the significant decline in faith and participation in the life of the Church. We are all aware of this. More and more baptised Catholics are living in isolation from their faith, distanced from Christ in their personal lives and no longer participating in the sacramental life of the Church. For so many of the current generation Christianity has been reduced to a mere orientation to do good, with the great catchcry of social justice. The personal need for God, for prayer, for the sacramental life have evaporated.

It is the great sadness and burden for the older generation of parents to see their children and their children’s children distanced from the faith. Even among committed Catholics there is a growing spiritual malaise. Participation in the life and mission of the Church is minimal , lacking a serious commitment to advance the apostolic mission of the Church.

Furthermore, we are experiencing increasing attacks on Christianity. There is a growing persecution of those who hold to the Christian faith. Many Christians are reluctant to publically declare their faith and their belief in fundamental issues like the sacredness of life or the true nature of marriage, or recognition of gender as God given. Even among family and friends we are being cowered into silence. And the workplace has become dominated by political correctness and identity politics.

The apostolic works of the Church have been significantly diminished. Our ability to catechise, to evangelise, to present the richness of the Catholic tradition is severely reduced. We as a Church are now a shadow of our former self.

We all bear this burden of the decline of the vibrancy of the life and mission of the Church. Yet, this Feast of Easter echoes hope and stirs our hearts to confidence.

From the sombre darkness of Good Friday, the radiance of new life sprang forth on Easter day. The darkness did not prevail. Now in our time and in our world, the darkness will not prevail.

Tonight/day let us sing of the triumph of Christ. Let us allow our hearts to sing. Let us lift our voices in bold proclamation: Christ has risen, Alleluia.

The ancient fathers of the Church rejoiced in the glory of the resurrection. So with St John Chrysostom we boldly and joyfully declare:

O death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory? Christ is risen and you are abolished. Christ is risen and the demons are cast down. Christ is risen and the angels rejoice. Christ is risen and life is freed. Christ is risen and the tomb is emptied of the dead: for Christ, being risen from the dead, has become the Leader and Reviver of those who had fallen asleep. To Him be glory and power for ever and ever. Amen.

Archbishop Julian Porteous

Sunday, 16 April 2017