

## Homily Easter Sunday - Easter Reflections - This too will pass - the Sun is always shining!

This is the text of the Easter Sunday homily delivered by Padre Gary Stone to the Runaway Bay Catholic community on 3 Apr 2021.

I would imagine if you were coming into an Easter service never having been to church before, you might be a little overwhelmed by now. There's no doubt that what we've heard is an extraordinary story. It almost too good to be true. But it is true and it is Good. It's the greatest story ever told. And for us it's a story that gives us HOPE, no matter what challenges or difficulties we face.

Jesus's life involved all the elements of life that we face: struggle, betrayal, suffering and even dying, perhaps physical but more often relational or emotional but that dying leads to new life. Friends Jesus story is our story too, a continuous cycle of life, struggle, dying and new life, which all the while makes us more resilient and hopeful and fruitful.

We have just heard some amazing inspirational messages in that feast of Scripture. Can I just read out to you a few of them that really impacted upon me:

*"I shall put my spirit in you;*

*Be fruitful, multiply;*

*Be founded on integrity;*

*In union with Christ, we are to imitate him;*

*Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, his love has no end.*

*There is no need for alarm;*

*You must go and tell;*

*He is going before you".*

Guided by that underpinning scripture, can we then explore how EASTER fits into our lives today?

For myself, it helps me be grateful that I am a disciple of Jesus. For me it is also the foundational story for our ANZAC spirit – The last post – the silence - and the Reveille – life death resurrection. Particularly it calls to mind for me the times that I have faced struggle pain and death and moved on to new life. There have been many times where my brain has told me my situation was hopeless, but where my spirit recalled the hopeful words of scripture, and where I've moved to pray – "Into your hands I commend my spirit". I've had to pray the prayers for the dying for myself and others many times in Iran, Iraq, Timor, Solomons and Bougainville, even in a Greenslopes hospital ward. I'm sure among us here there are many others that have faced the prospect of death or feeling hopelessness, -many of us have been suffering servants, but coped because we recalled that Jesus was with us as in the words of tonight's gospel – *"There is no need for alarm. Jesus is going before us. We must go and tell others about this".*

Certainly, I've come to the position that no matter what situation we find ourselves going through, like Jesus said to Pilate, we were born for this, we have come into the world for this, to give witness to what God can be doing in our lives, no matter how difficult our situation.

The fascinating thing about the Christian life is that there can be a positive outcome to every trial and suffering that we go through. In my case being taken captive in Iran lead me on to a new journey to become a chaplain for the army and for the police, and then to many other amazing experiences. And another very difficult time in my life when I had cancer and peritonitis, led me to establishing a health and wellbeing ministry to many service people and their families: over the last seven years we have saved the lives of many suicidal veterans.

The faith that we profess tonight recognises that Good Friday suffering is always a precursor to Easter Sunday's resurrection and new life and new opportunities. How we do that on Gold Coast, in the Runaway Bay Parish and in our daily lives must be a question on our minds as we move from Easter into new life.

Last week, I was with Father Marty at our clergy convocation in Brisbane. We participated in a number of talks and discussions about where our church could be going into the future. We've been through some difficult times recently, our church has taken a hit in both participation and funding, COVID continues to challenge us and our neighbours in the Asia Pacific region are really suffering. The consistent message that we got from the words of the Pope, through the Archbishop, and from many other speakers last week was that we were born to be missionary. We were born to be always seeking out new ways of how we can bring good news to the poor, liberty to captives, to proclaim new sight to the blind, to set the downtrodden free and proclaim the Lord's favour. That was the mandate of Jesus and it's ours too. Out of the suffering and death of Jesus, and without any resources or church facilities, Christianity was born and flourished in the midst of persecution.

I asked Father Marty in what way would he would want me to encourage the community tonight: he said Inspire them with HOPE. Friends when I work with suicidal veterans feeling hopeless, do you know what strategy I use. Well of course I listen empathetically to them, and embrace them in love and care, but then I challenge them into reflecting how they can reach out and help others beyond their known community. I tell them, we need you to help us care for others in need. Our expanding band of wounded ill and injured veterans seek out and helps others, not just here on the Gold Coast and Qld but we also run a mission in Timor. We've helped construct and operate a boarding school and TAFE for the rural poor in a remote mountainous region. I know this Parish, your parish has done marvellous charity work in the past, but COVID has caused a whole new class of poor in spirit in our midst. Could I inspire you individually and as a community to explore what more could be done to support people living on the margins of your society. Fr John Chalmers reminded us last week, we gather together so we may scatter into mission and ministry ...

Friends, we are part of the greatest story ever. This Easter we have heard again the ever-present call of Jesus for us to be his missionary disciples. Friends, New life awaits us. We might not be sure what form that it's going to take but we place our lives in the hands of Jesus. We commend our spirit to him and we recall that we were born for this, we came into the world for this - to be a witness to the truth to all those that we can come in contact with. The mission of Jesus of Nazareth has been given to us. May we listen to his voice and put that into new initiatives to reach out to those who need to hear his voice, but will only hear it, through our presence and our actions and our love.

--