



Easter Message 2021

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According to the gospel of John, Jesus spoke the following words to his disciples on the night before he died:

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God still and trust in me (John 14:1).

These words were spoken in the context of the Last Supper. During that meal Jesus had taken bread, broken it and given it to his disciples, telling them to eat it because it was his body which would be given up for them. He had then taken a cup of wine and invited them to drink from it, telling them that it contained his blood which would be poured out for them and for many (Mark 14:22-25; Matt 26:26-29; Luke 22:19-20). In the context of the growing opposition to Jesus from some of the religious leaders of his time, the apostles would have understood from these words that a crisis was coming which would engulf not only Jesus but them as well. In telling them not to let their hearts be troubled Jesus was speaking into their fear, uncertainty and doubt.

Jesus says the same words to us this year when we, too, are facing uncertainty, and even fear, because of the ongoing crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic which, in spite of the great progress being made in relation to vaccinations, still continues to ravage many parts of the world and threatens to again come and disrupt our lives.

Do not let your hearts be troubled, he says to us. Trust in God still and trust in me.

It is not always easy to follow this advice given to us by Jesus. The challenges we face, not just because of the pandemic but because of the many other difficulties and problems that each of us faces in our personal, family and community lives, often overwhelm us. As is the case in so much of what we say about our Christian faith, our lived experience differs from the high ideals we profess. The reality for many of us, at least some of the time, is that we **are** afraid and we **are** uncertain. We can often feel as if God is not there or does not care.

This, in fact, is not the case. God is closer to us than we are to ourselves. The faith we seek and the peace which Jesus promises to give us are precious gifts, always on offer to us – but they are never forced upon us. It is good to remember that, in the context of telling his disciples not to have troubled hearts, Jesus goes on to remind them that he is the Way and the Truth and the Life (John 14:6). In saying this Jesus is suggesting that if we were to follow some other way rather than his we might well get lost – and, as most of us know from experience, when we get lost we easily become disoriented. We lose our bearings, wander around aimlessly and sometimes even begin to panic and despair. Keeping to his way, and returning to that way once



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we realise we have strayed, is our sure method for stilling our troubled hearts and receiving the Lord's gift of peace. Similarly, if we commit ourselves to some other truth rather than the truth which Jesus makes known to us about who he is, about who God is, and about who we are in relation to God, then we run the very real risk of building our lives on a mirage or, as Jesus would put it in the gospel, on shifting sands rather than on solid rock (Matt 7:24-27). If we have to spend our lives struggling to maintain our balance because our foundations are so shaky, then we will not have untroubled hearts or that deep peace which is the Lord's gift. And again, if we fail to unite ourselves with the Lord in such a way that our life is enriched and deepened by the presence of his life within us, the serenity and trust which enabled him to endure the opposition, the cruelty and the violence of those who were determined to destroy him, will evade us. Our hearts will remain troubled and they will not be at peace.

When Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to his disciples his first words to them were, "*Peace be with you*" (John 20:20). Because of their love for him and because of the time they had spent with him the disciples were able to receive his gift of peace and their lives were transformed. May this be your experience, too, as we celebrate the life, death and resurrection of Jesus this year.

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