

Easter Vigil 2023

In 1882, the German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche famously said, “God is Dead”, but in 2023 as we celebrate the Easter Vigil here at All Saints, we can confidently say, that Nietzsche is Dead but **God is still alive, because Christ has been Raised from the Dead!** Christ is Risen! He is Truly Risen! Alleluia! Alleluia!

However, the real question is, not so much whether we comprehend the all details of the doctrine of the resurrection, but whether or not we have encountered the Risen Lord Jesus? **Is Jesus truly alive for you?** Or is he a celebrated figure from the past that you have a deep fascination about? **Is the resurrection true for us in a personal and a life changing way? Do we live our lives as if God is alive or as if God is dead?**

In his work, *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche states **“God is dead, God remains dead, and we have killed him”** – by these words, Nietzsche does not so much mean that Atheism is true, but that the *“Christian faith has become unbelievable after the European Enlightenment, when the goddess of reason, authority of sciences, and secular philosophy arose across Europe to dismantle the authority of Christianity and its claims of truth about life and the universe”*

Indeed, Nietzsche’s cultural critique is right in many aspects. He rightly prophesied that everything that was built upon the **‘Christian World View’** in the West was headed towards a miserable end! We can only agree with him as we contemplate the Post-Christian Western civilisation! Most fundamental aspects of human truth held and cherished for centuries in the Christian West are thrown out in great haste. Unfortunately, for politicians, governments and people many **God is dead, God remains dead, and they have killed him**

As Pope John Paul II, remarked in his cultural critique, the western world is embracing a culture of death! When God-given revelation is thrown out and self-autonomy becomes the reference for all matters of right and wrong, we have begun to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. **In attempting to kill God and all godly truth and goodness, it is humanity that will ultimately be destroyed.**

In his address to the Pontifical Academy of Science in 1996, Pope John Paul the II said “Truth cannot contradict truth”; his talk was on evolution, and how the theory of evolution, as supported by empirical data, did not necessarily contradict catholic teaching, and the doctrine of creation. If sciences, reason and religion operate in their particular domains, no discipline can truly contradict another. Unfortunately, for many modern and post-modern minds, religion is at odds with reason, and the sciences. This is truly unfortunate – because it shouldn’t be!

Sciences, reason or political ideologies do not have the power to threaten a living faith in God, if founded by an encounter with Risen Lord Jesus Christ.

Sciences and reason can only challenge a mere intellectual faith, a premature faith, a mere emotional faith, but not a living faith.

To have a living faith we need to encounter the Risen Jesus Christ, who is not a guru in the past but a living Saviour. We need to encounter him in our hearts, and in our minds in and through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, given to true

believers. This is my prayer for each of us today that during this Easter tide, that we freshly encounter the Risen Christ!

This is God's answer for the darkness of our world, which has killed God!

God's answer has always been constant. When humanity fell in Adam and Eve, God promised a Saviour. Throughout the history of salvation, he prepared the chosen people for the coming of the Messiah. We are celebrating the paschal mystery of his life, death and resurrection during this Easter Triduum, no matter what the question is Jesus is still the answer – this might sound cliché but it is true!

To the degree we have encountered the Person of Jesus and received his Holy Spirit, we will have the peace that goes beyond all understanding, the hope that is contagious and the faith that moves mountains. More importantly, we will be empowered to become witnesses, to the living Christ.

You and I are sent into this dark world, not to be consumed by its darkness but to shine the light of Christ in the middle of that darkness. **All the psychical darkness in the Universe cannot overcome the light of a single candle. Similarly, all the spiritual and moral darkness cannot overcome the light of a single Christian who is alive in Christ. As St Irenaeus said, the glory of God is man (the human being) full alive!**

This is what we are doing tonight, and will do every Easter; until the Lord comes again to judge the living and the dead, the Church will proclaim the ultimate Victory Jesus has won for us. We are joining the millions of Christians worldwide, to proclaim that God is not dead, he does not remain dead, and even though we killed Jesus on good Friday, Jesus has defeated the power of death as he was raised victoriously to new life on the third day! **God has the final word!**

Materialism is the greatest heresy of our times, the conviction that more material things and mere human progress can make us happy without any reference to the immaterial reality of God. Jesus' resurrection from the dead speaks to this spiritual reality of humanity. *Matter itself is not enough, man does not live on bread alone, matter needs to be redeemed by God, as Jesus' human and material body was glorified in his resurrection, all our material reality need to be directed and redeemed through the saving work of Jesus.*

While many of us who are listening, still believe in God's existence and the resurrection of Jesus, at times we all live with the rest of the **world as if God is dead.** So let us long to encounter the Risen Christ, just as the characters of our gospel story we heard today.

The angel of the Gospel story, said to the women who came looking for the body of Jesus, **“Do not be afraid; for I know that you seek Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen. Come, see the place where he lay...”**

These women were invited to become witnesses of the resurrection to his disciples... **go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead...** as they were running with great fear and great joy, **the risen Jesus himself meets them...** whom they took hold of and worshipped! **This is their encounter with the Risen Lord!** – no ideology will be able to shake their faith now - they have encountered the Risen Lord! –Jesus asks the women to tell his disciples to meet him in Galilee, where it all began, and later on, when his disciples saw

Jesus on the mountain, **they too encountered the Risen Lord and worshipped.** This was the beginning of the work of evangelisation as Jesus gave them the great commission “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything (not some things) that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” **Now God is truly alive for these disciples, and that changed the rest of their lives and the history of our world.**

Each of us share in this great commission, this is our privilege and calling too. World is changed, transformed and evangelised not so much by religious professionals but by disciples who encounter the Risen Lord! **We are Easter people and Alleluia is our song!** We are people who believe that our God has defeated the power of evil and the finality of death. The death and resurrection of Jesus is the pattern of every Christian life. There are many deaths in our lives...broken relationships, unfulfilled dreams, disappointments, regrets, dead ends and so on and so forth...but we also experience with God new beginnings, new hopes and new dreams. **We are called by God to be witnesses of his life here on earth, we are called to stand out and not to blend in!** St. Peter reminds us **“You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy people; praise God who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light”**

So let us invite the Risen Lord Jesus into our hearts and lives anew today! Let us pray that we encounter him! So that we can live lives that reflect our hope and faith in a loving God who is not dead but alive! Through the crosses of life he will lead us to his resurrection and new life... Let us allow the Joy of the Risen Lord to arise in our hearts as we celebrate Easter this year! He is Risen Indeed!