



EASTER MESSAGE 2024

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

May the grace and peace of the Risen Lord be with you as we celebrate the feast of Easter.

As we celebrate Easter this year, I am conscious that many people are really struggling with having to deal with the higher cost of living, making repayments on mortgages, or finding an affordable house to rent, falling agricultural prices, or managing health and well-being issues. On the international front, we are confronted with the sight of women, children and families being displaced from their homes and livelihoods by war, natural disasters or economic disadvantage.

Into all of this dark reality, we again hear the story of the faithful women, Mary of Magdala and Mary the mother of James and Salome (Mk 16:1) as they go to the tomb early in the morning after Jesus is crucified and buried. They carry with them the spices to anoint the body of Jesus. We can imagine their grief, sadness, and distress as, walking together at sunrise, they prepare for their arrival at the tomb where the body of Jesus lay. We can almost hear their whispers amidst their tears and grief in readiness for what they imagine they would find. We can hear them pondering who will roll away the stone so that, as bearers of mercy and tenderness, they can minister to their deceased friend.

On arrival, they discover not only the heavy burial stone had been rolled away but are met by the young man in a white robe (Mk 16:5) with the words *"There is no need for alarm. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified: he has risen, he is not here"* (Mk 16:7). How shocked and bewildered they must have been. There is an urgency as they must go to the disciples and Peter! They set off on another journey with hearts renewed for the empty tomb was no longer a sign of death but the fulfilment of all that he had taught them. These faithful women are the first bearers of the unending story of the Risen Lord. Their story is also our story. The story of the brothers and sisters of the Risen Lord experienced in our daily lives through the gift of his Holy Spirit who, "goes before us."

We are people of the story. Each of us has our own story to tell of the wonder of our personal faith in the Risen Lord. Each of us at different moments, fleeting as they may be, experience the presence of Jesus within us, among us. He is always with us: but how often do we fail to hear him, and to feel him close?

He is Risen. He is with us. We see him in our communities of faith across the Diocese of Sale. We witness his healing touch in the humble lives of those who follow him. We see him in the gentle care of couples and families as they walk with one another in the good times and bad, in sickness and health, unto death.



We see him in the powerful witness of single people, who by choice or circumstance, are enabled to be loving friends of prayer and service. We see his healing work in the feeding of the hungry, in the sharing with those who struggle financially and socially. We see his grace in the lives of the sick, the aged and frail, the confused of mind and the lives of those who require the gentle assistance of others. We see him in the sacramental care of our clergy bringing his sacramental presence to nourish, to reconcile, to bless and to strengthen God's holy people with God's holy gifts. We see him in the gift of religious life immersed in solidarity with others and in daring to live a life of simplicity. We see him everywhere.

In so many ways the Risen Lord comes to us and lifts our hearts to see the dignity of life, mission, service, mercy, and compassion as our daily mission too, not as burden, but as our gift for others. Our anointing in his life, death and resurrection calls us to lead lives of co-responsibility in his mission to bring Good News to the world.

At times our hearts will be weary, as we feel burdened by the apparent darkness of the world, as we witness acts of violence inflicted upon innocent children, families and individuals caught up in wars they did not choose. We may feel as though the weight of these stones of darkness will never be rolled away.

But the story of Easter reveals to us the essential message of the resurrection: that the power of God's love can roll away any stone. When the time is right, the gift of peace for troubled lands will rise, and for those whose lives are beset by turmoil, violence, and the terror of war, new life will emerge. May we, for whom the stone has been rolled away, be bearers of true peace, hope, mercy, compassion, and justice, born from the wounds of the Risen Jesus.

May the dawn of the Easter sunrise remind us that Jesus Christ is the true Light of the world, in him there is no darkness. He is not found in an empty tomb! He "goes before us" rolling away the stones calling us to new life! Alleluia

Bishop Greg Bennet
Easter 2024