

Homily for Parishes in the Western Region without clergy

Bishop Cam Venables – Sunday 28th April 2019, Easter 2

Readings: **Acts 5:27-32**

Revelation 1:4-8

Psalm 118:14-29

John 20:19-31

Last week, on Easter Sunday, the lives of many were torn apart as two Catholic churches, an Evangelical church, and three luxury hotels were bombed in Sri Lanka. From the information released to date it is understood that at least two hundred and fifty people have been killed, and a further five hundred injured. Before moving on from those statistics it is worth remembering that each of the children, women, and men who died in Sri Lanka had a name, a circle of friends, and plans for the coming week. It's worth remembering that each of those who died were people like you and me.

Those who were killed in church shared our Christian faith and proclaimed the Easter affirmation: 'The Lord is risen! Alleluia!' They were singing hymns and praying, as we do. They were breaking bread and sharing wine in memory of Jesus, as we do. But, in the midst of those faith-filled gatherings suicide bombers murdered and maimed. Many in Sri Lanka are afraid about what might happen next. Many Muslims in stayed away from their mosques on Friday because they feared reprisals. Some Catholic churches in Sri Lanka will not have services this weekend because there is information that extremists are planning further attacks.

We should pray for God's blessing on the people of Sri Lanka in this terrible time of uncertainty, grief, and fear... And we should pray because we understand that in the Body of Christ they are our brothers and sisters. I wonder how the opening verse of this weekend's Gospel will be heard by our Sri Lankan sisters and brothers for it says: *"When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you" (John 20:19).* When the disciples were afraid about what was going to happen next, Jesus came and stood among them saying, 'Peace be with you!'

This not to suggest that anxiety and fear can be transformed quickly into tranquility and peace, but there is this Scriptural reassurance that God is with them, and with us, in the midst of brokenness and the pain. There is the comfort and hope that God will lead them, and us, from the 'valley of the shadow' into 'green pastures' (Psalm 23: 4;2) And, there is the reminder of another occasion where Jesus said to his disciples, then and now, *"...remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age"* (Matthew 28:20b).

Of course there are other words from the Gospel that are less easy to hear. Words which suggest that all who follow Christ should *'Love their enemies, and pray for those who persecute them'* (Matthew 5:44). Easy to read, but hard to put into practice. Yet there have been some empowering witnesses to non-violence in recent weeks

It was inspiring to have heard from Farid Ahmed, a senior leader at the Deans Avenue Mosque in Christ Church, that he had forgiven the Australian who killed his wife and many of his friends. Incredibly, he said, "I love him to be honest. I think probably he went through some trauma in his life, probably he wasn't loved... I don't hate him at all, I don't hate him at all, not at all." Farid went on to say that forgiveness is what his wife, Husna, would have wanted.

Incredible also to have heard from Pastor Roshan Mahesan, the senior pastor of Zion Church, Batticaloa, “We are hurt. We are angry also, but still... the whole congregation and every family affected, say to the suicide bomber, and also to the group that sent the suicide bomber, that we love you and we forgive you, no matter what you have done to us, we love you, because we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.”

In today’s Gospel, Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” When he had said this he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” (John 20:21-23).

If you are in the midst of turmoil and grief – could your prayer be – ‘Please sustain me... and in time give me peace?’ And, if you have been wronged deeply and struggle with the call to forgive could your prayer be, ‘Please sustain me, and bless them?’

In the midst of each breath this week may we have a sense of God’s Spirit sustaining, empowering, and bringing peace.

‘Peace be with you.’

And, let’s pray...

God of resurrection life, we ask your blessing on the people of Sri Lanka, commending to your love those who have been killed, and all who mourn.

We ask your blessing on all who have been injured, and those who care for them

We remember all leaders in Sri Lanka, as they respond to what has happened, and give thanks for their wisdom and courage.

We also remember those who have perpetrated this violence, and commend them to you.

We ask for a sustainable peace in Sri Lanka, and in all countries of the world, trusting that in every human life, hatred may be transformed by your love.

We pray in the name of the one called ‘Prince of Peace’, Jesus the risen Christ.

Amen