

Homily for people and parishes

Bishop Cam Venables – Sunday 24th April 2022, Easter 2

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

Psalm 118:14-29

Revelation 1:4-8

John 20:19-31

Have you ever wondered why Easter doesn't fall on the same day each year? We know that ANZAC Day is always on the 25th April, and we're looking forward to dawn services commemorating this tomorrow. So, why is Easter not a similarly consistent date? The answer is fascinating, and will put us ahead of many in future trivia quizzes – particularly when we recognise that there are two possible answers!

In the Western Church – and this includes the Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Anglicans, and others – Easter falls on the first Sunday after the first full moon of the Spring Equinox! This means it will fall on a Sunday between the 22nd of March and the 25th April. However, for Eastern Orthodox Churches, Easter is designated to be on the Sunday after the first full moon after the Jewish Passover! That date will always fall on a Sunday between the 4th of April and the 8th May.

You'd be right in thinking that there has been much astronomical and theological discussion over the last two thousand years to come to these conclusions but the practical result is that some years Christians in the West and East celebrate Easter on the same day but, most years the date is different.

To be honest, that difference hasn't been much on my radar over the years but the war between Russia and Ukraine has been in the news each day and the majority of people in each of these countries are Orthodox Christian. According to a 2015 survey 71% of Russians are Orthodox, and 78% of Ukrainians. To complicate things there are within Ukraine two Orthodox Churches – the Ukraine Orthodox Church which is under the authority of the Russian Patriarch in Moscow, and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine which is autonomous, and has its own Patriarch.

So... the last week has been Holy Week for the Ukrainian and Russian Orthodox Churches, and 'though the United Nations called for a four-day cease fire so that people would not be killed while going to church... that cease fire was not agreed to. Consequently, Russian and Ukrainian Orthodox Christians have killed and maimed each other in Holy Week while we have watched on in horror, drinking coffee. On Maundy Thursday President Putin even declared that the strategic City of Mariupol had been 'liberated'!

Most of Mariupol's population have fled their homes and communities; and most of the city has been reduced to rubble. It is estimated that more than 10,000 people have been killed and several hundred thousand have fled as refugees. What has happened seems to fit

more easily with the brokenness of Good Friday and the unknowing darkness of Holy Saturday.

In Ukrainian Easter Sunday is called, 'Velykden!' which means, 'Great Day!' and they will affirm that Christ is risen and they will listen to the Gospel that tells of Jesus meeting people on the day of his resurrection. The Lord is risen! Alleluia! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Our Gospel today also speaks of Jesus meeting people after resurrection. Jesus meeting a group who were so frightened they had locked themselves in a house because they were frightened about what would happen next. For those people sheltering from missiles in the subways of Kyiv there would be understandable fear about what might happen next, but we don't have to be in war torn Ukraine to know fear and uncertainty. Stuff can happen in any person's life, such that an anticipated future is forever altered and we're not sure how we're going to get through— even wondering if we're going to get through!

Unexpectedly Jesus came and stood in the midst of that frightened little group and said, 'Shalom aleichem!' which means, 'Peace be with you!' At one level this was the normal greeting offered by one Jewish person to others and it continues to be a regular greeting used today. If Jesus had been Australian I dare say he would have said, 'Giddyay!' just to normalise things and settle people down. However, Jesus was Jewish and he was speaking Hebrew and there is a gift for us in his first choice of words.

As I understand it the word 'Shalom' is difficult to translate into English with a single word because it is simultaneously in past, present, and future tense! More than a greeting it seems to be a prayer that the person or people being addressed would know peace in the past, in their present reality, and onwards into their future and the future of their descendants.

Some words or phrases that could help explain the meaning of 'Shalom' could be: 'I'm with you!' 'We've got this!' and, 'I'll see you through!' Does that resonate with you? Jesus saying to those frightened disciples; to the frightened citizens of Kyiv; and to ourselves if we are afraid: 'I'm with you!' 'We've got this!' and, 'I'll see you through!'

Then Jesus breathed on them, as he breathes on us, saying, 'Receive the Holy Spirit...'

'I'm with you!' 'We've got this!' and, 'I'll see you through!'

Would you please join me in prayer

God of resurrection life,
we ask your blessing on the people of Ukraine and the people of Russia,
commending to your love all who have been killed, and all who mourn.
We ask your blessing on all who have been injured,
and on all who care for them

We ask for a sustainable peace between Russia and Ukraine,
and for peace in all countries where there is war;
we ask for the grace that in every human life,
hatred can be transformed
by your love.
We ask in the name of the one who said, 'Shalom!'
Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Amen