

***+ Lord in your name on this Holy Day.***

The weeks of Lent leading up to Easter are the busiest, most intense time of the year for a priest. Holy Week very quickly becomes the festival of Easter and suddenly the great three days begin. I have journeyed through Lent wondering how I will get everything done before Easter. I have filled every waking moment – and a lot of non-waking moments – with busyness. And then Percy arrived. Early in the morning just as it became light on Monday a week and a half ago, I went for a run and discovered the abandoned Percy in a driveway of an empty house on a main road. Percy was two weeks old, black and fluffy with little white paws.

Percy was lost, fretting, very underweight and incredibly needy. He hated the expensive kitten formula fed from a special bottle with a latex teat. The milk dripped everywhere, hardening on his soft fur. He soon developed diarrhea and began to smell horrible. Suddenly he didn't seem so sweet and lovable. He meowed constantly and the sound tested our patience. Percy demanded an enormous amount of time and attention for such a little creature, and I was at my busiest. But Percy forced me to stop, take the necessary time to care for him and forgo my busyness.

It shouldn't take the needs of a little desperate creature to pause sufficiently in this holy season to wait and watch for the unfolding events of Easter to draw us into the magnificent mystery of Christ crucified. Sometimes however, the demands of the world get the better of us, at least they did for me. I have reflected how in this season I received an opportunity, a gift in the form of a ball of living fluff, howling and needing love. I was forced to slow down a little and think about the vulnerability of life, especially when it turned out that little Percy was not thriving despite our best efforts and his little life slipped away in my hands earlier in the week.

Easter is about life. Even Good Friday is about life, despite the emphasis in our service today on death, Jesus dead on the cross. Good Friday is the catalyst for life, for the resurrection on Easter morning. It is difficult to travel with Jesus through his suffering, his human death, the absolute annihilation of crucifixion and entry into the stone-cold tomb. Even Jesus died. His cry of abandonment from the cross was left unanswered until the third day. God could not accompany Jesus to the dead. The human body of Jesus must go where even the divine Father could not go.

Did the Father weep when the Son breathed his last agonising breath on the cross? The divine intention was always this day, this day that we call 'good.' The vulnerable human body of Jesus, the temple of the incarnate Christ, was intended for death. It is so difficult to

understand why. It is always difficult to understand why when someone we love dies, even when death is an inevitable outcome of suffering. Only through death could life become triumphant. Every created thing passes on from this life. Even Jesus' human body could not withstand the cross. Yet the cross became God's instrument for the revelation of the immensity of life – this also was the divine intention.

There is so much suffering in the world today and well may we wonder if human beings have learned anything from the ministry and teaching of Jesus. It seems there has always been much suffering, so much wasted life. The Romans crucified people relentlessly. They became proficient in the art of making people suffer for as long as possible: the careful alignment of the nails driven through flesh and sinew, the assurance that it could be up to a week before death finally occurred. Thousands of people were tortured unbearably, crucified – even women endured the cross, as a recent excavation in Italy has shown.

Not so for Jesus. The Jewish authorities were adamant this man would not live through the day of preparation to the sabbath. No Jewish person could do the work of taking down the body and burial on the sabbath. And the Roman executors always had another victim waiting in line for the cross. For six hours Jesus hung on the cross. Life never seems so precious as when it becomes obvious that a person is dying. The hours tick away, and we can never have enough time. Life is so very precious, so very vulnerable.

God's vulnerability in becoming human in Jesus of Nazareth gives us the most profound insight into the pattern of life, the transition through mortal death and into another life. The death of Jesus on the first Good Friday is the catalyst which enables resurrection from the dead. When Jesus descended to the dead, he died utterly in his human body. Jesus could not rise by himself on the third day. Only God could complete this resurrection, God who by nature of pure divinity could not die. The hand of God pulled the Christ from the tomb, resurrected, to show the world that no matter the vulnerability of our human forms, life prevails. Life belongs to the creator and to the creator it returns.

Take time today to reflect on life, not death. Good Friday means life, that God's intention is fulfilled. The sombreness of this day is tinged with the joyful anticipation of something much greater than the carrying of the body of the Lord from the cross and sealing it in the tomb. That news is for the third day, but it is news which makes our souls glow. May this Friday be indeed good for you. May you draw near to the Lord and wait patiently through the hours. Resurrection morning is certain and on that morning life defeats death for ever.