

## Vigil of Prayer for Peace in our World – 19 October 2023

### Homily

Fr David Ranson

In the face of the magnitude of suffering, particularly before the suffering occasioned by violence which we have seen and heard these past weeks, we are paralysed by our powerlessness. Deep questions arise in our hearts, Why do we revert to violence to achieve our ends? Why do innocent people have to suffer as much? How can a good God let this happen? Each of these is a difficult question, and one which can confuse and torment us.

The questions may be too much for us to consider if it were not for the radical imagination that recognises the one answer to anxiety suffered is a suffering love. That is, the explanation that is given us to our questions about the torment of suffering is never in words, but in an event: the experience of a love that identifies with us in our suffering, that holds us in our suffering, that assures us that we are more. From the Christian perspective, God has become the human God who cries out with us and in us in our prayer, and who intervenes on our behalf when torment makes us dumb. The God who has become human has made our lives part of God's life and our sufferings God's suffering. That is why when we feel pain we participate in God's pain, and when we grieve, we share God's grief. If God is capable of loving something other than God's own self, God is open to the suffering which love for the other brings, while remaining master of the pain which is the consequence of love. God does not suffer out of deficiency of being, like created beings. But God does suffer from love, the overflowing superabundance of God's own being.

Once we sense this, we perceive that God is not the cold, remote force of destiny whom we have to accuse and cry out against in our prayer in the face of the violence that besets us. And in companionship with the one who suffers with us we find the strength to remain in love and not to become bitter despite pain and sorrow. Then we begin to experience the place of Resurrection, when the place of seeming darkness turns into a place of possibility, when that place of apparent death becomes the place of hope and life.

Then question in our suffering and in our prayer, "How can God let this happen?" becomes transformed into a new question. "Where is God in what is happening?" God is in the anguish of the victims the cry of the innocent, the question of the confused, the glimpse of reality in the perpetrator.

The late Australian Jesuit Pat O'Sullivan was keen in telling this little dictum:

When power meets power there you have alienation

When power meets vulnerability there you have oppression

When vulnerability meets vulnerability there you have intimacy

It is intimacy that the God offers us: an intimacy which restores our dignity and offers us the courage to be creative in our life. It is in this context that we offer our prayer of intercession this night, our hope born out of our hunger.

And we do this not alone, but together.

We are united in our hunger for peace, that 'hunger and thirst makes friends of us all' to paraphrase John O'Shea. In the awareness of our common hunger there is an experience of solidarity. We stand united in our hunger, and we express this solidarity whenever we come together to pray for our needs. There is an act of resistance here: it is resistance to the forces in our world that run on the illusion of control and total self-determination. Praying together for a certain need, hoping together in our hunger, subverts any complacency of self-sufficiency as it overturns the message that the status quo is the full horizon. We believe that the status quo is never the full horizon: things do not have to

be this way; we can keep moving, keep growing, keep opening out into life. Our intercession expresses that our God is the God of life who is calling us into richer and more abundant life. They express our commitment to struggle through the obstacles to that life, to have those obstacles removed, to a world in which we are genuinely brothers and sisters to one another, a world in which our diversity is complementarity not a threat, a world in which justice is not revenge but a new way of being in relationship with each other, a world of care rather than of competition, a world of peace which is not the absence of conflict but a navigation of difference which never loses sight of the incalculable value of every life.

Is such a world possible? Only if you and I work to create it in the circle of our own life.