

**First Sunday of Lent 2019**  
*Sunday 10 March*  
**Rite of Election**

**Homily**

Very Rev Dr David Ranson  
Diocesan Administrator

There is an old African parable about how best to catch a lion. When looking for a lion never go hunting for it, says the parable. The lion will always elude you. To catch a lion, it is necessary to stop still, to light a fire and to wait for the lion to find you.<sup>1</sup> The parable is a good description of one of the important characteristics of our discipleship of Jesus. Like the African warrior, our task is to live with continuous expectancy, with ever increasing sensitivity, watchful for the way in which the life of the Risen Christ comes to greet us. As the German writer, Jürgen Moltmann, writes, “*We wait and hasten, we hope and endure, we pray and watch, we are both patient and curious. That makes the Christian life exciting and alive.*”<sup>2</sup>

Christian life is both exciting and alive! It is exciting and alive even in the midst of the inevitable difficulties that we experience, even in the midst of all that, at time, threatens to overwhelm us, even in the midst of the darkness through which we journey especially at this time as a community of faith. It is exciting and alive because as Christians who proclaim that Jesus cannot be found in a tomb, we are those who live a life in constant watchfulness and expectation. In the apparent absence of Christ from our midst, we live our life with watchfulness. Our watchfulness leads us, as the same writer, Moltmann, suggests, to “*expect the presence of God in everything I meet and everything I do . . . What does God have in mind for me? What does God expect of me? What is he saying to me through the things that are happening in my world, and what is my response?*”<sup>3</sup>

According to Moltmann, this means that we are those who can no longer “*pray with closed eyes, but [now rather], messianically, with eyes wide open for God’s future in the world. Christian faith is not blind trust. It is the wakeful expectation of God which draws us in all our senses.*” He goes on to illustrate that indeed this was how the first Christians prayed:

standing, looking up, with arms outstretched, and eyes wide open, ready to walk or to leap forward. We can see this from the pictures in the catacombs in Rome. Their posture reflects tense expectation, not quiet

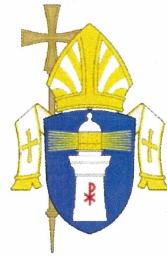
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<sup>1</sup> See Vincent J. Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered: An epistle from the Masai*, (London: SCM Press, 1978), 63.

<sup>2</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *In the End – The Beginning: The life of hope*, translated by Margaret Kohl, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 88.

<sup>3</sup> Moltmann, *In the End – The Beginning*, 84-85.

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heart searching. It says . . . We are on the watch, in expectation of the One who is coming . . .<sup>4</sup>

The more watchful we live, the more awake we become. Watchfulness becomes wakefulness. This makes us, therefore, - or at least *should* make us - the very opposite of living as those who are asleep, as those who are living with inertia and passivity. To live with watchfulness and hope, as Moltmann writes, is to “wake up out of the petrifications and numbness of our feelings. We burst apart the armour of the apathy that holds us in an iron grasp. . . We wake up to the world as it is spread out before God in all its heights and depths.”<sup>5</sup> As he says elsewhere, “[This] spirituality of life breaks through [the] inward numbness [to life], the armour of our indifference, the barriers of our insensitivity to pain. It again breaks open the ‘well of life’ in us and among us, so that we can weep again and laugh again and love again.”<sup>6</sup>

Our scriptural tradition, however, suggests that for us to be brought to this expectancy with clarity and freshness, we have to be led through the various defences we weave around ourselves, to accept the truth of oneself. As another writer, Raimundu Pannikar reminds us:

*If we would see and love the Real, there must first be a rupture, a break, a conversion of the tissues of the heart. Although we know by faith that this rupture is always a response to God's initiative in our lives, we must still suffer the painful losses involved.*<sup>7</sup>

This is why, when the Lord calls us forward, we cannot avoid the deserts of our life. In the Scriptures the desert is the place where the people return to the truth of their dependency on their God. Everything else is stripped away, except this radical truth. Allesandro Pronzata writes, the desert is the “place where we discover the roots of our existence. Once we grasp this lesson, [we do not need to go into a geographical desert]. You can find your desert in a corner of the house, on a motorway, in a square, in a crowded street. But you must first renounce the slavery of illusions, refuse the blackmail of pressure, resist the glitter of appearances, repudiate the domination of activity, reject the dictatorship of hypocrisy. Then the desert becomes a place where you do not go out to see the sand blowing in the wind but the Spirit waiting to make his dwelling within you.”

Therefore, our journey to Easter and the metaphor of the desert go hand in hand. Our journey calls us into the desert – as Pronzata suggests - not the desert of sand but rather the desert of whatever strips away the illusions we have of ourselves: the wilderness of our grief, the wilderness of our waiting, the wilderness of our disappointments. We don't have to create experiences of the desert. Rather, the genuine deserts of our life find us in all those

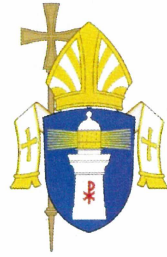
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<sup>4</sup> Moltmann, *In the End – The Beginning*, 83 -84.

<sup>5</sup> Moltmann, *In the End – The Beginning*, 83.

<sup>6</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A universal affirmation*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 97.

<sup>7</sup> Raimundo Panikkar, *Blessed Simplicity: The monk as universal archetype* (New York: Seabury, 1982).



experiences which lead us home to ourselves – not as we would like to be, but just as we are – without pretence, without presumption, without projection. We are called to take these deserts of our life – however they present to us – with seriousness such that we might become freer from the burden of pretence, of presumption and projection.”<sup>8</sup>

These desert bear within them a radical invitation: something is called to die, in order that something might live. We die to the illusions we have of ourselves; we rise to the freedom the truth about ourselves enables. We are invited to let go of all the external ways by which we measure our value, our esteem, our success. We are called to come internally into ourselves with honesty, acceptance and possibility. In so doing we die to our defences, our denials and delusions and rise to hear that which makes us able to be more open, more attentive, more receptive. To be roused from our sleep and to live our life awake is to experience the power of resurrection life. For resurrection life is a life becoming awake. We never quite live fully awake but the Risen Christ for whom we watch and expect leads us into greater and greater wakefulness in life. Moltmann concludes, “*People who know that there is someone who is waiting for them and expecting them never give themselves up. And we are expected.*”<sup>9</sup> It is because we know that we are awaited and expected that we keep awake in our life, resisting the seduction to fall back asleep in life. And being those who are awake, we are those who keep stretching out into new horizons, “stretching out to what is ahead, [always with] a readiness for a fresh start.”<sup>10</sup> As people of Resurrection faith, the future is given us as pure gift. Even in the midst of the confusion and disenchantment that marks our time, that future is given to us, always, a relentless invitation. And herein lies our joy!

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<sup>8</sup> Henry Thoreau, “Where I Lived, & What I Lived for,” in *Walden*

<sup>9</sup> Moltmann, *In the End – The Beginning*, 85.

<sup>10</sup> Moltmann, *In the End – The Beginning*, 87.