



CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF MELBOURNE

30 March 2021

Dear Friends,

I realise we are still in fairly volatile times and that things can change rapidly but it seems as though we will be able to gather face to face in our communities to celebrate Holy Week this year.

A sense of the deprivation that we all shared last year came to me as we celebrated the Palm Sunday liturgy this week, in particular in the reading of the Passion. The missing year of 2020 may serve to accentuate the centrality of Holy Week to our Christian identity and life.

There is no doubt that the emergence of a pandemic disrupted our usual lives and certainties. In the past twelve months many people have lived in fear and isolation. In parts of the world, death rates have soared. Certainly, it has not been all bad and many good things continued to happen over the last year, there were even some benefits that came out of lockdown as people had time to recalibrate their priorities and figure out just what is most important in life. Nevertheless, the overall sense of fear and isolation that characterised the past year has made a significant impact on our lives and on the community. In a certain way things can never be the same again and we are all too aware that we are not returning to business as usual.

In the Archdiocese, too, we face some particular challenges as to how we continue to bring good news into the lives of our people and communities. The challenge around the number of priests that we have available to fill vacant parishes for example, is emerging as a daily lived reality.

Over the coming twelve months and beyond we need to face in to this issue and together with our people to imagine new ways to create vibrant and viable, life-giving communities.

Archbishop Comensoli, in his recent Patrick Oration outlined succinctly the challenge that confronts us:

"We need to face into this perhaps uncomfortable truth. As I read recently, "We are built for a church that no longer exists, and we have an infrastructure for a Church that no longer exists." Again, Pope Francis has been quite explicit about this, calling on local Churches not to struggle to hold on to what it has left behind but to see itself as a mission church moving outward. (cf. EG.28; 33) This is going to require a renewal of the lay apostolic life."

While the prospect of change can bring with it a sense of uncertainty, grief and fear we remain a people of hope and this season of Holy Week and Easter leading up to the feast of Pentecost accentuates that the Church has always and will always need to adapt to meet the needs of the People of God and the world.

May I take this opportunity to wish you and your parish communities a blessed and Holy Easter.