

HOMILY FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN EASTER

In our funeral rite, there is an opening prayer which is often used which says, “By the power of the cross you have made us strong; in the sacrament of the resurrection you have sealed us as your own.”

It is not speaking about one of the seven Sacraments of the Church. It is a reference to the sacramentality of all things – the ability of all things to reveal something of God to us.

The resurrection is the event which, so far, has only ever been seen in Jesus Christ. It is sacramental because it is a sign of what will be for us. The resurrection is the sign of our eternal life; the sign of our freedom; the sign of God’s commitment to us for all time. The resurrection is the sign under which we Christians live. The resurrection is the banner under which we march.

As we celebrate ANZAC Day this weekend, what has been said about the resurrection has some familiarity with what has been achieved through the sacrifices of others – we have a certain kind of life, freedom and commitment. What has been achieved can be easily lost if we are not prepared to keep working at it – much like the influence of the resurrection.

The Acts of the Apostles reveals how the followers of Jesus Christ found the courage to challenge powerful leaders in order to act for the good of others.

Jesus revealed courage when he presented himself as the good shepherd who never abandons his sheep, even in the face of danger.

Three times he says, “I lay down my life for the sheep,” revealing the commitment he is prepared to make. We know from his prayer in the garden of Gethsemane that there was fear for Jesus but, he accepted the Passion and the crucifixion, knowing that this was his purpose. It was courage because there was fear. You cannot have courage without fear. You can have fear without courage but, you cannot have courage without fear. Courage is to rise above fear.

Courage is to take control of yourself in a situation. These are the values of ANZAC Day – the willingness to give – to serve the greater good at the risk of one’s own life. In many ways, to have the willingness to show something of the strength of Jesus who said, “I lay down my life of my own free will.”

Even without war, it takes courage to commit to such a purpose. We know that at times, it takes courage to love and to have compassion as Christian people. That we are the children of God who have been lavishly loved is not to simply sit in that love and do nothing. It is to act in accordance with the heart of God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

The courage Jesus showed was his commitment to the flock, even those who were not a part of the sheep of this fold. His mention of the other sheep who were not of this fold, was not a reference to other Christian denominations as is sometimes interpreted. There was no concept of these other denominations when he said this. This was a commitment to all people, not just the group which was evidently his. Jesus came to save and to be the shepherd of the entire human community.

The disciples in the Book of Acts demonstrated their commitment to the growing Christian community and its call to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. They showed their courage in commitment.

The ANZACS were committed to the good of the nations they came from.

The Anzacs present us with another human experience of courage. They are a sign to us of what commitment looks like. They are another inspiration for us to take into account when we wonder how we can be better Christian people. They show us what is humanly possible.

Our sense of belonging to the mission of Jesus Christ should prompt a willingness to make sacrifices and to serve. This shows us something of what is to walk in the light of the resurrection we received at our Baptism.