

Living the Hope of Easter: Archbishop Dermot Farrell, Pastoral Letter, Easter 2022

They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him." (John 20:2). Mary's grief at the death of her Lord, is compounded by the shock of the empty tomb. Someone has taken the body of the one she loves. Like Mary Magdalene and Jesus, we live in brutal times. In our world we see death and destruction all around: we cannot avoid the inhumanity of war in Ukraine and the plight of refugees; we sense the impending disaster of climate change, and our apparent inability to prevent catastrophe; even within the Church there is much that causes sadness. On that first Easter morning, Mary of Magdala's dismay was transformed: she and the apostles realised that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Everything had changed.

The story of Easter is the story of a world restored. As in nature, what seemed dead, comes – in the mystery of spring – to leaf and blossom, and is even more beautiful than we remembered. Easter, however, is not only the story that makes sense of what happened to Jesus; it is also the story of what happens in our Church. Our hope permits us recognise the signs of resurrection in our faith communities: the risen Lord is always at work among us, bringing something new to be experienced, embraced, and lived.

Encountering the Risen Lord

Like Peter and his companions, we are commissioned to proclaim the good news of what is happening among us. Our encounter with the risen Lord opens our eyes and emboldens us to face the challenges of our time. Our Lord has not left us; He is with us at every step of life's journey. For people of faith, Easter is not just some date, but the meeting with Jesus that restores our lives, and rekindles the hope every person needs. "Hope is the door that opens onto the future" (Pope Francis, April 26, 2017). True hope is neither fatalistic nor naïve; but that which permits us embrace life as it is. True hope, born of the faithfulness of our God, unlocks the imagination of God's people.

Over recent weeks, the people and priests of our parishes have been journeying on the Synodal Pathway. We have been discerning how the Spirit is guiding us on our way through life. We have listened carefully to each other and are coming to know the strength that comes from gathering as sisters and brothers in Christ.

Building Hope

It is time now for the whole diocesan family to travel further, by addressing the specific challenges we face as a diocese. The *Building Hope* Task Force in its Report proposed a strategy by which we can be renewed for the mission which Christ has entrusted to us all. Last February, in response, I issued a Statement of Mission for the Archdiocese emphasising that our primary purpose is to accompany people today towards an encounter with the Lord Jesus. This undoubtedly requires new ways of looking and thinking; it requires a shift in mind-set; and will need responsible stewardship. It will not happen without prayer and dialogue. We will need to discern and make decisions, and make decisions together. (Statement of Mission) This is now our common road.

I am therefore inviting each parish community, as part of our *Building Hope* strategy, to begin to reflect on how best to respond to the pastoral situation in which we find ourselves. It is very clear that the future will not look like the past. Our world has changed: we cannot return to the past. God is bringing forth something new (see Isaiah 43:19). Our challenge – and it is ours – rather than simply reacting to events, is to shape the future in the light of the gospel. This is the work of God's Spirit among us, but – like Mary – we have to welcome it (see Luke 1:38).

Courageously Journeying Together

Truly, we need to be courageous in moving beyond ways that no longer work in the Ireland of today. We need each other on this road: that means all the baptised, working closely together, with their gifts and talents, sharing their resources and wisdom, in the service of our parishes, and the one mission entrusted to us all by Christ.

I ask parish teams, parish pastoral councils and parish finance committees to lead their parish in a discussion of the gifts and talents available to them, the education and formation they need, and the parish partnerships that make most sense in their locality. Resources to support this initial Building Hope conversation over Easter and Pentecost will be made available shortly. While the work we are now beginning will require commitment over the coming year and more, it also gives us a unique opportunity to witness to and renew our own faith and that of our community.

Opening our Hearts

As we journey through Eastertide, and towards Pentecost, may our prayer for renewal deepen and strengthen. May Mary, Mother of the Church, our mother, who stayed close to the friends of Jesus in dark times, gather us as we celebrate the Resurrection of her Son. May she inspire us to open our hearts to the Spirit of Him who is love made flesh. In working together, and supported by the prayer of the many witnesses that have gone before us, may we be renewed in Christ, and make a difference to our world and all its peoples.

St Mary Magdalene, Apostle to the Apostles, pray for us.

St Laurence O'Toole, pray for us.

Mary, Mother of the Church, pray for us.

+Dermot Farrell
Archbishop of Dublin