

Easter Enigma

Easter offers Australians the opportunity of a holiday. We only have this holiday because it is prescribed in the calendar of the Christian year. Large numbers have headed for the hills, mountains, beaches, lakes or rivers to get away from it all!

But how many will reflect on the deeper meaning of the Easter events which gave birth to this "holy-day" commemorating the death of one man in the Middle East? The suffering and death of Jesus of Nazareth at the beginning of the first century AD seems a far cry from the life of contemporary Australians. In the past centuries eloquent preachers describing the death of Jesus on a Roman cross would frequently move even strong men to tears. But not now.

Modern Australians have become almost accustomed to horror stories of suffering and graphic descriptions of death. TV news frequently portray scenes of human bodies that have been butchered, or are being pulled from the rubble of buildings flattened by earthquakes, or are being recovered from the twisted wreckage of a car crash. Against such a background it is an enigma that this weekend so many people around the globe will celebrate in communion the anguish and death of one solitary man.

The deaths of significant individuals are rarely remembered around the world today. Ordinary people seldom reflect on Julius Caesar's murder. There's no public holiday in honour of Socrates drinking hemlock. Few pay any attention to the anniversary of Winston Churchill's death. Yet for nearly 2000 years millions of people have observed the death of this Galilean. Why? Obviously these enigmatic aspects about Easter suggest that there is more than appears on the surface.

The trial of Jesus itself is not without its ironies. The names of Caiaphas the High Priest and Pilate a Roman governor of Israel would never have been remembered today except for the fact they both presided over kangaroo courts that condemned Jesus to death. The sentence of death Pilate passed is a criminal miscarriage of justice. Yet Jesus' death more than that of any other has dignified humankind and opened an eternity of possibilities.

Why good should flow from the evil events that first Good Friday cannot be grasped apart from the events of Easter Sunday. The answer to the Easter Enigma lies in the conviction that Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. For while we were sinners Christ died for us. That through this man, Jesus of Nazareth, is preached the forgiveness of sins. Salvation is to be found through Jesus alone; in all the world there is no one else whom God has given who can save us. This is what we celebrate at Easter.

[I am indebted to an article "An Easter Reflection" that appeared in The Age in April 1979]