

**Sermon preached by the Dean Emeritus, The Very Reverend Canon Dirk van Dissel at the
Memorial Service for the late Bishop Graham Howard Walden,
Bishop of The Murray 1989 – 2001**

1 Corinthians 15: 20, 55, 57

Christ has been raised, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Death is swallowed up in victory.

O Death, where is thy victory

O Death, where is thy sting.

Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Te Deum (BCP)

When thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death, thou didst open the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

You overcame the sting of death and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.
ibid (AAPB)

I consider it a great privilege to be asked to preach at this service in which the Diocese of The Murray pays its respects to, and gives thanks to God for, its second bishop, Graham Howard Walden. I thank Bishop John Ford, the fourth bishop, for giving me this honour, I am humbled by it and I pray that I may indeed both pay adequate tribute to this man, whom we all loved, and also proclaim clearly and forcefully to you the gospel of the risen Lord by which he lived, which sustained him in suffering, and in which he died. On behalf of all of you I express my condolences to Margaret, Bishop Walden's widow, and to their children and assure them of my prayers.

I begin with a short summary of Bishop Graham's life and in this acknowledge my debt to the excellent paper Bishop David Chislett presented at the third history conference which I organised in 2001 at St Francis Christies Beach in honour of Bishop Walden's retirement. Bishop Chislett, who now serves in England, regrets that he is unable to be present at this commemoration or at the funeral in Dubbo and assures me he will be remembering Bishop Walden at the altar.

Graham Howard Walden was born in Brisbane on 19th March 1931, the son of Leonard Howard Walden, a bank manager, and Mary Ellen Cahalane. He was educated at "Churchie," the Church of England Grammar School, where he was a contemporary of Dr Keith Rayner.

Like many other young men, a number of whom subsequently went on to high office in the church, Graham Walden, in his teenage and undergraduate years, came under the influence of Archbishop Reginald Halse and of Father Richard Pearson, Rector of the leading Anglo-Catholic Church All Saints Wickham Terrace. Graham Walden made his first confession to Fr Pearson, first attended Benediction at All Saints, and was later to be awarded the bursary established in Fr Pearson's memory.

Graham Walden attended the University of Queensland, and in 1952 gained a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy with First Class Honours. Having been accepted for Ordination by

Archbishop Halse, he proceeded to St Francis College, gaining his Licentiate in Theology in 1954. In the same year he was awarded his Masters in Philosophy, and was made deacon by Archbishop Halse on 15th September, the Feast of the Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary. How fitting it is that Bishop Walden, who had such devotion to our Lord's mother and was made deacon on one of her feasts, should have his funeral on another Marian Feast, the Conception of our Lady.

Having won the Douglas Price Memorial Prize as well as the University of Queensland Travelling Scholarship, the young deacon proceeded to England, where he would continue his studies at Christ Church, Oxford. The Oxford of the 1950's was the Oxford of the great Anglo-Catholic scholars and teachers such as Austin Farrer, Leslie Cross, founding editor of the famous *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Kenneth Kirk and Robert Mortimer. Doctor Eric Mascall, perhaps the greatest of them all, was Graham Walden's supervisor of Studies at "the House."

Bishop Wand, Bishop of London and Halse's predecessor as Archbishop of Brisbane, ordained Graham Walden to the priesthood at St Paul's Cathedral on Trinity Sunday, 1955, and licensed him as Assistant Curate at St Saviour's, Poplar, in the East End of London, where Halse had been curate 50 years earlier.

And just as Halse has gone from the East End to the Bush Brotherhood of St Barnabas in North Queensland, so Fr Walden returned to Australia in 1959 and joined the Brotherhood of the Good Shepherd, centred at Dubbo in New South Wales.

In 1960, Bush Brother Graham Walden was sent to St Ambrose, Gilgandra, with the attached mission districts of Gulargambone and Warrumbungle areas. It was there that he met his wife Margaret Ann, daughter of Thomas Vincent Brett and Jean Mary Brown. They were to marry in 1964.

In 1963, Fr Graham Walden became Vice Principal of St Paul's Theological College on the island of Moa in the Torres Strait, in what was then the Diocese of Carpentaria. Fr Graham was only there a couple of years, yet he is remembered with enormous affection by islander clergy as someone who truly loved them. One of the islander priests, one of Bishop Graham's students, told a friend of mine, "The teachings of Fr Graham are still what we feed our people today."

In 1965, Fr Graham returned to the Diocese of Bathurst, becoming Rector of Mudgee. There he had as one of his curates, John Gaden, who became Warden of St Barnabas College. In 1968 he became Archdeacon of Barker. In 1970, Bishop Hardie of Ballarat invited Fr Walden to become full-time Archdeacon and Vicar General, to replace Robert Porter who had been elected first Bishop of The Murray.

In 1981, the new Bishop of Ballarat, Bishop John Hazelwood, appointed Fr Graham Walden Assistant Bishop and Rector of Hamilton. He was consecrated in St Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne, on 25th March 1981, Lady Day – another Marian Feast.

In 1989, Bishop Walden was elected second Bishop of The Murray and was enthroned in the Pro-Cathedral of St John the Baptist at Murray Bridge on 29th June 1989, the Feast of Saints

Peter and Paul. Bishop Walden's episcopate was not to be an innovative one. Faithfully maintaining the Anglo Catholic tradition of the fledgling Diocese—it was only nineteen years old when he became its bishop—he provided continuity and stability during a time of economic decline in South Australia marked by the rural recession and the collapse of the wool price, and characterised by continual secularisation and de-Christianisation. Both of these were to affect the viability of the Diocese and its parishes. A high point was the joyful celebration of the Diocese's 25th anniversary in 1995.

Bishop Walden was also Vice President (since 1993) and Chairman of the Anglican Men's Society (1983-1993), member of General Synod Commission on Doctrine (1989) and subsequently its Chairman (1992), a member of the Anglican-Lutheran Conversations (1989), and Anglican Chairman of the Ballarat Joint Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission (1977-1989), and member of the General Board of Religious Education (1970-1981).

So much for the history lesson. But we are not here to have a history lesson. We are here to thank God for the life and gifts of a good man, a bishop in the Church of God, an apostle of Christ. As I reflect on that, the following came to mind immediately. Bishop Graham was a gentle and kindly man. He was unassuming, with always a smile on his face. He walked humbly with God (Micah 6:8).

Bishop Graham's life and ministry were centred on Jesus. In his sermons he reminded his listeners again and again of what God has done for us in Jesus and urged them to draw more fully in their daily lives on the reality of Christ, in us, the hope of glory. And because Bishop Walden's life was centred on Jesus, it was centred on the Eucharist. It was characterised by prayer, in particular intercessory prayer. Because Bishop Walden loved Jesus, he had a deep devotion to our Lord's Mother. For the same reason, he was a man of the scriptures and took seriously St Jerome's dictum; that ignorance of the scriptures is ignorance of Christ.

The Ordinal of The Book of Common Prayer, which was used at both Bishop Graham's Ordination and Consecration, places great emphasis on the priest's and bishop's pastoral role. The gospels appointed are drawn from John 10 and John 21: 15-19, and forcefully bring home to the ministers of the Church that they must model themselves on Jesus the Good Shepherd.

This Bishop Graham endeavoured to do. He was a pastor to all the people entrusted to his care, but especially to his priests. In his dealings with them he was caring, supportive, understanding, generous and forgiving. He always gave them the benefit of the doubt and a second chance, when perhaps it would have been wiser not to have done so. It is therefore no surprise that during his episcopate the Diocese was peaceful and happy.

Bishop Graham was courageous. His time as bishop coincided with the introduction of novelties of all sorts into the life and faith of the Church, and there was great pressure on the Church's leaders to succumb to them. Many, for reasons we can only guess at, did succumb. But Bishop Graham remained true to the catholic faith as he had embraced as a teenager. Our gracious and loving God bestowed many and varied gifts on Graham Walden, gifts which he used to proclaim the catholic faith and to build up people in it.

For this many are exceedingly grateful, and for that reason we have come together to thank God. A service such as we are celebrating today is however, more than a thanksgiving for the life of a godly man. It is also a challenge to reflect on what are the four Advent themes, but by what is no means confined to Advent – Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell. It is to death that I now turn.

Death is scary.

All of us fear death.

We are all afraid of what may lie on the other side of death.

It is the fear of the great unknown

Death is the last enemy.

That is the bad news.

But the good news of the gospel is that Jesus, in his death and resurrection, stripped death of its power to frighten.

In St Paul's phrase, Jesus "drew the sting" of death.

Jesus showed that all the fear and ugliness of death are on our side.

All the love is on God's side.

If, like Bishop Graham, we have made the decision to love God, to honour him, to serve him, to worship him, and to treat him as a friend, then death becomes a homecoming, a cheerful and gentle surrender of physical life.

That decision can be made by anyone at any time. It is never too late.

That is the other good news of the gospel. It is never too late.

C.S. Lewis, as always, has something valuable to say on this. Lewis is writing about the premature death of his friend, Charles Williams. I quote;

"No event has so corroborated my faith in the next world as Charles Williams did by dying. When the idea of death and the idea of Williams thus met in my mind, it was the idea of death that was changed." (C.S. Lewis, *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*, 1947)

"The idea of death was changed."

The real value of this statement is that it points to the great historic and cosmic fact that when the idea of death and the idea of Jesus meet, it is death that is changed; indeed it is death that is defeated. The obedience and the wisdom of Christ took death out of the world, by so transforming it that it has nothing but outward signs in common with what we "normally and healthily fear."

It is just this fruitful, patient, gentle technique of death that Jesus has bequeathed to us. Well may we sing in the words of Cardinal Newman's great hymn "Praise to the holiest in the height;"

"O loving wisdom!

"O wisest wisdom!

"O generous love!"

By Christ we are simply taught how to deal with this most intractable of the world's terrors – death.

“It was the idea of death that was changed.”

Bishop Graham made the decision to love and serve God. He lived his life in the belief of the Christian Faith. His faith was sustained in the fellowship of the Church, the Body of Christ;

- By the Scriptures
- By the Sacraments of the Church
- By Prayer

That is why I am prepared to apply C.S. Lewis' words to Bishop Graham.

“When the idea of death and the idea of Bishop Graham Walden met in my mind, it was the idea of death that was changed.”

“When thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death, thou didst open the kingdom of heaven to all believers” as the *Te Deum* proclaims. Or as the modern translation has it; “You overcame the sting of death, and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.”

The Christian Church last Sunday entered upon Advent, the season that focuses on the coming of Christ – as the baby in the stable in Bethlehem, in our daily lives, and as Judge of the living and the dead at the end of time. Already there are Christmas parties, Christmas breakups, Carol services and all the rest. Soon there will be Nativity Plays and Nativity Sets will be erected. It was always my practice at St Francis' to erect the Nativity scene on the side altar, with the altar cross behind and as it were overshadowing it. In this way the great truths of the Christian faith were kept together – because Incarnation and Atonement belong together. The Incarnation finds its fulfilment, its completion, in the Atonement.

In the Incarnation, Jesus took upon himself our human nature, and in our human body strove against the foe and defeated death. Christmas, Good Friday and Easter Day belong together and so we are brought to the manger in the stable, to the cross on the little hill outside the city wall, and to the empty tomb in the garden. These together proclaim the great truths, the stupendous facts of our faith. And because of these facts, Christians dare to say that the idea of death is changed – changed by Jesus.

Death is swallowed up in victory.

O Death, where is thy victory

O Death, where is thy sting.

Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 15: 55, 57

It is beautifully stated in an anthem from the Greek Orthodox liturgy; Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and giving life to those in the tomb.

Bishop Graham Walden's life and ministry were an inspiration to the people he came across. He taught some to pray better, others he encouraged to study the bible, in others he kindled a love of the sacraments particularly of the Holy Communion, in others he inspired a devotion to our Blessed Lady, and in some he increased their understanding of the

mysteries of the Christian faith. All of us were encouraged by his steadfast adherence to, and defence of, the catholic faith, the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

Above all, Bishop Graham was the adoring follower of Christ, his incarnate Lord and living friend. It is therefore with thankfulness to God that we come together today to commemorate and give thanks for the life of one of his servants and ministers, Graham Howard Walden, Bishop in the Church of God.

So we leave him in the hands of God whom he loved and so faithfully served, and we pray that the Lord may grant him a peaceful refreshment, and in a place of quiet consolation, may allow him to profit by the intercession of his saints, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

V. Rest eternal grant to him, O Lord

R. And let light perpetual shine upon him.

V. May he and all the faithful departed rest in peace and rise in glory.

R. Amen.

I conclude with a prayer after John Donne, one of the leading poets and preachers of the 17th century, which was one of Bishop Graham's favourites and regularly prayed by him.

Bring us, O Lord God, at our last awakening into the house and gate of heaven, to enter that gate and dwell in that house, where there shall be no darkness nor dazzling, but one equal light; no noise nor silence, but one equal music; no fears nor hopes, but one equal possession; no ends nor beginnings, but one equal eternity; in the habitations of thy glory and dominion, world without end. Amen.