

March 31, 2018

8:30 p.m.

The Resurrection of the Lord at the Vigil in the Holy Night of Easter

As we are gathered together in our beautiful Cathedral Church, at this relatively late hour, we have now completed the first half of this Easter Vigil, which the Liturgy itself refers to as “the Mother of all Vigils”.

This is a truly holy night for we join not only with fellow Christians throughout the world celebrating this most important Feast of our Christian Faith, but we also rejoice with our Jewish sisters and brothers who are celebrating their most holy week of Passover during these same holy days.

This is a very special night, not only because of the big “Final Four” Game going on right now between two great teams---Michigan and Loyola, but because this is the night we have been looking forward to for 40 days since Ash Wednesday.

As we have seen already in the movingly beautiful Liturgy of the New Fire as this Easter Candle was carried through the dark Cathedral, proclaiming “Christ our Light”, and the Hymn of Praise known as the “Exultet” was sung so beautifully by Msgr. Osborn; and as we have heard so powerfully in the expanded Liturgy of the Word about the wonders God has worked for us His Chosen People, from the Creation of the World, to the New Creation He brought about in the Resurrection of His Son and our Lord Jesus Christ, we can no longer contain the joyful exclamations I hope we all experience in our hearts that are expressed in *Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!*

And so, dear Family of Faith, I extend to you, in the name of Msgr. Osborn, Father Vinh Le, Father Tran, Deacon Bouchard, and myself, our heartfelt greetings for a joyful, blessed and Happy Easter! This is the one night a year that we come to Mass, knowing that the Mass will be long, and that’s OK, because we are celebrating the most important Event in the History of Humankind.

It’s a night for our senses to be bombarded with beauty and pleasant sights, sounds and smells: Fires and Lighted Candles, Sweet-smelling incense and gorgeous flowers, the ringing of bells and the sounds of brass, organ and harmonious human voices.

It’s a night for us to be reminded about the story of Salvation through the multiple Readings both from the Old Testament and the New Testament.

It’s a night to welcome new members into our Faith Family as we will do in just a few moments when Carla Hammel, Morgan Taylor Baer and Nate DeBoer are welcomed into the Catholic Church, will receive the Sacrament of Confirmation, and when Carla and Morgan will join with us for the first time in receiving the Holy Eucharist.

It’s a night for all of us to be reminded about our own initiation in the faith when we were Baptized, and to take the occasion tonight to Renew our Baptismal Promises and recommit ourselves to live our lives as followers of the Risen Lord.

It’s *the* night when we see Jesus rise victorious from the grave, and by doing so, He crushes the power of sin and death, and wins for us the promise that we too will live forever when our lives are completed in this world, and when we too will experience “resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come”. As the Exultet said so poetically: “*O truly blessed night when things of heaven are wed to those of earth, and the divine and the human unite.*”

In the first Reading this evening from the Book of Genesis, we heard how God, out of nothingness, created every thing, and every living creature and human being in the world, and most important of all that God found everything, and everyone, that He made to be “very good”. Our God not only is our Creator, but our Loving Father Who loves us unconditionally.

We heard, in the Reading from the Book of Exodus, about the Jewish People being delivered from generations of slavery in Egypt through the miraculous passage thru the Red Sea, finding freedom in the Promised Land as God’s Chosen People, a foreshadowing for all of us as we pass through the slavery of sin and into the freedom of new life in Baptism.

And in our Reading from the Prophet Isaiah, we hear God extending such loving invitations to all of us to “*Come to the water....Come receive grain and eat....Come to Me...listen, that you may have life. Seek the Lord while He may be found; call on Him while He is near.*” And that passage concludes with the Lord God saying “*My Word shall go forth from My mouth, and shall not return to me void, but shall do My will, achieving the end for which I sent it.*” From our New Testament perspective, of course, that Word is in fact God’s Word made Flesh, Jesus our Savior, Who came into our world to redeem us from sin, and to destroy the power of sin and death through Jesus’ death and Resurrection. Jesus clearly achieved the “end”, the purpose why God sent His Son into the world---to reconcile the world to God and to bring us salvation.

And in our Reading from St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans, we heard him promise us that “*if we have died with Christ, we, who are baptized into Christ, ...shall also live with Him.*” As Jesus is resurrected to New Life, so too are we who live with Him because of Baptism.

The most important part of God’s Word that we hear this evening is of course our passage from the Gospel of St. Mark, the oldest record of Jesus’ Resurrection that we have. As the holy women came to Jesus’ grave very early on the morning following the Sabbath to anoint His dead Body, their only concern was how they would be able to roll the stone away from the entrance to the Tomb. Of course, they found the Tomb already open, and a young man---an Angel---waiting to give them the message of Easter: “*You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the Crucified. He has been raised; He is not here.*” The women’s reactions were mixed, as would be only natural; they didn’t know what to think, or how to react. How could this be? Isn’t this too good to be true?

But then the Angel gave them their instructions---“*Go and tell His disciples---and Peter.*” That was the first Gospel proclamation. And that remains the basic Gospel mandate for the Church down through the ages. For 2,000 years, priests and people have been told to “Go” into the world, and “tell” whoever will listen to this, the greatest Good News ever known. Jesus has crushed the power of sin and the strong hold it tries to have on each of us, and He has defeated the ultimate power of death. What God intended from the beginning when He created our first parents, Adam and Eve, was for us to live with Him in Paradise forever, now in Jesus’ Victory has been re-established. Death no longer has the final word. Because of Jesus’ Resurrection, we, who are baptized into Christ, will pass through our human deaths and rise with Him to eternal life. Alleluia!

That’s why this next part of our Easter Vigil is so important because we take time to remember how important our Baptism is, and why it’s so critically important for us to renew our Baptismal Promises and live our lives as Disciples of Jesus as faithfully as we possibly can. We look forward to Baptizing Carla Hammel, receiving Morgen Taylor Baer into the Church through a Profession of Faith, and celebrating the Sacrament of Confirmation for both of them, as well as Nate DeBoer.

But all of us here this evening will also be asked to renew our Baptismal Promises in just a few minutes. And when we do so---when we answer “I Do” to the several questions we will be asked, we are promising to faithfully and joyfully follow Christ in every aspect of our lives. And ALL of us know, that’s not an easy thing to do. In fact, our culture makes it more and more challenging to live good and holy lives. We need one another’s support, we need the graces of the Sacraments and Devotions of the Church, especially the Holy Eucharist, and we need the grace of God and the courage and guidance that comes from God’s Holy Spirit.

Just as the Angel gave the original Easter mandate to the Holy Women on that first Easter morning, that remains the mandate that each and every one of us is asked to fulfill every day of our lives: “Go” into the parts of the world where we live and work and play and raise our families; and “Tell” our spouses, our families, our friends, our co-workers, our neighbors, the people we ride the bus with---tell them in words, and tell them through our deeds of charity and works of mercy; tell them that Jesus is Alive!

We can be up to that challenge because of what we celebrate here on this most special and truly blessed Night! We can be faithful Disciples of Jesus because the Light of Christ dispels all darkness in our lives and lets us walk in the Light! We can be Joyful Witnesses to our Faith in the Risen Christ because God’s Word is always effective and accomplishes the purpose for which He sends it. We can be Evangelists---people who share the Good News of the Resurrection---because our Baptism into Christ has brought us into Life with Christ and with His Church, so that we are never alone; we have no need to be afraid. We can faithfully and joyfully live our Baptismal Promises because we have Jesus Himself to be our Food and Drink in the Holy Eucharist---He lives in us, keeps us united with Him, and sends us forth in His Name as His very Presence in our world.

We can do all of that, my dear Family of Faith, because of everything that we celebrate on this very special and holy night. We can do so because “**Jesus...the Crucified has been raised” Alleluia!**

God bless you, now and always!