

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

April 3, 2021

9:00 p.m.

St. Augustine Cathedral

As we gather together in our beautifully-decorated Cathedral Church at this relatively late hour (when some of us might be thinking about “Bedtime”), mid-way through this Sacred Triduum, which began with the Mass of the Lord’s Supper on Holy Thursday, and continued with yesterday’s Solemn Liturgy of the Lord’s Passion, we come to celebrate what the Church calls: “*The Resurrection of the Lord at the Vigil in the Holy Night of Easter*”. This Sacred Triduum will actually conclude tomorrow afternoon at the end of Evening Prayer.

Tonight with are united with the entire Christian world in celebrating the greatest Feast of our Christian/Catholic Faith. In addition, this Holy Night is even more special, since all the Jewish members of our universal Family of Faith are also celebrating this most holy time of Passover. So, if there was any doubt---this is indeed a “Holy Night” for much of the world.

That’s what we’ve already seen, and heard, and experienced so far in these first two parts of this four-part Sacred Vigil of Easter. We “saw” it when this beautiful Easter Candle was lit from the New Fire, and by its single Flame, dispelled the darkness of our Cathedral, and we heard the joyful proclamation begin----“**Christ our Light**”. We heard the Joyful proclamation of Praise sung in the “Exultet” by Msgr. Osborn, as the Light of Christ---shared with each of us holding our own Candles---illuminated the darkness, just as Jesus, the Light of the World, has dispelled and overcome the darkness and power of Sin and Death. And in that hymn of praise, we heard “**This is the Night when...**”----and then a list of all the ills, evils, powers of sin, including the ultimate experience of human death are listed as being overcome, and destroyed, by this Night when Jesus conquered the Grave, and Rose Victorious as our Savior.

This is the night for our senses to be bombarded with beautiful and pleasant sights, sounds and smells: fires and lighted candles, sweet-smelling incense and blooming flowers, the ringing of bells and sounds of organ---and harmonious voices. And that is why we can no longer contain our Joy; after 40 days of silence, and because of what “this Holy Night” means, we proclaim with all our hearts: “Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!”---over and over again.

And so, dear Family of Faith, in the name of Father Creagan, Father Vinh Le, Deacon John Bodway and Deacon Don Bouchard, Msgr. Osborn and in my own name---I extend to all of you our heartfelt greetings for a joyful, blessed and hope-filled Happy Easter!

As we just experienced, this is a Night for us to listen to a summary of the History of our Salvation. We did that through the three Readings from the Old Testament Books of Genesis, Exodus and the Prophet Isaiah. The Genesis reading reminded us that God is the Creator of ALL the world and all humanity. The Exodus Reading told of the miraculous liberation of the Jewish people from the generations of slavery in Egypt by crossing the desert, and then passing thru the waters of the Red Sea with God Himself holding back the waves. And the Prophet Isaiah reminded us again of God's unconditional Love for us, and His unbreakable Covenant that tells us God is ever-Faithful to His promises.

Those were only 3 Readings----but really, the entire Bible is one, huge, Love Story written by God to us, His People. But----as we know all too well----that "Love Story" has been very "one-sided" throughout the History of the world. We, human beings, consistently turned away from God, broke His covenant, and thought we were able to live independently on our own.

Yet, our Loving God kept looking for ways to restore the Covenant with us, His beloved People. And so, *in the fullness of time*, God made the ultimate sacrifice of sending His own Son---His Word in the Flesh of Jesus---to be "God with us". Incredibly, humanity rejected even this "Son of God"; in response to God's "Love Story", we killed the "Author's Son". Human reason would dictate that would have been the end; that God would have "had it" with us. And yet....out of the "darkness" of sin---out of the "darkness" of constant, human rejection----out of the finality and deepest darkness of death-----comes "Christ, our Light". And this Light can never, and will never, be overcome again.

As the Angel told the holy women in tonight's Gospel: "*You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He is not here; He has been raised.*" It's interesting to note that in the beginning of tonight's Gospel passage, as the 3 women were going to the Tomb on that early Sunday morning (the day after the Sabbath), the biggest question on their mind was: "*Who will roll back the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?*" It certainly wasn't: "I wonder if Jesus is still there?" That would have never entered their mind; their beloved Jesus was dead, and buried; it would never occur to them that He wouldn't be there. But as it turned out, they were asking the wrong question. The "*young man clothed in a white robe*", God's Angel, then gave them a mission: "*Go and tell His disciples and Peter.*"

That was the first Gospel proclamation. And that remains the essence of the Good News proclaimed by the Church down thru the ages. "He is not here in the Tomb; He has been raised as He promised. Sin and death are destroyed; Christ is our Light, and the Light of the World!" That's what St. Paul meant in tonight's powerful Reading from the Letter to the Romans: "*We who are baptized into Christ Jesus are baptized into His death..... So, if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.*"

That is yet another reason why this is truly a "Holy Night", so that all of us can be reminded about our own initiation into our Life with Christ through Baptism. And it's an extra special Night because we all get to welcome 3 new members into our Family of Faith. Hunter Matthew Guarrant; Kathryn Michelle Wilmotte, and Nicholas Jerome Godi will each be Baptized into Christ, Confirmed in our Catholic Faith, and will be one with us and sacramentally united with Christ in the Holy Eucharist for the first time on this Holy Night. These are 3 very special young adults----each with their own life story that has brought them to this moment of entering into a Life of Faith in the Catholic Church. As one of them put it so well: "It's been a bit of a rough road to be sure, but I'm glad I'm here at last." And Hunter, Kathryn, and Nicholas----we're all glad you're here as well.

But whether, like these 3 Catechumens who are making this decision to become Catholics at this point in their life stories, or like all the rest of us who made that decision at other moments in our lives----all of our life stories continue to move forward. And on this Holy Night, it's appropriate for ALL of us to consider our own commitment to follow Christ. That's why, after these 3 newest members are baptized into Christ, all of us will be asked to renew our Baptismal Promises as well---to renew our commitment to love God; to be even more determined to reject the power and influence of the Devil in our lives---to reject sin and ward off temptation---to choose to follow Christ, rather than give into the pressures to make choices to do otherwise.

As we look at our world, we realize these are turbulent and difficult times. Aside from the continued hold the Pandemic has on us with all the accompanying anxiety and worry that comes with that, there are so many changes taking place in our world. There are: cultural forces being exerted upon us; social mores that are changing; moral standards that are being ignored; political divisions that are polarizing; and more and more people ignoring God and God's ways--doing what all the Scriptures of Old have noted: how humanity continues to turn a deaf ear and a hardened heart to God's Amazing Love Story.

Dear Family of Faith, through our gathering this evening on this Holy Night, let us remember who we are---the Beloved of God our Father, Redeemed and Nourished by the Body and Blood of Christ, and empowered by God's Holy Spirit. We are the Body of Christ! And, as St. Paul said so powerfully: "*Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life.*"

The holy women on the way to the Tomb were asking the wrong questions; their concern was about the huge Rock standing in the way of the Tomb. Dear Friends, the power of God's Love has removed the biggest of all the Rocks from our path---His unconditional Love has overcome the power of Sin and Death in Jesus' Resurrection. His abiding Love for us accompanies each of us along our Life Stories, and will never abandon us----and that's why Jesus continues to say to us: "*Do not be afraid!*" Instead of worrying about questions like "who will move the Rock", we all need to focus on the urgent "mission" this Holy Night entrusts to all of us: "Go and tell" this incredibly, earth-shattering, life-changing Good News of Jesus' Resurrection and our New Life in Him to all the world!

We, as Jesus' Disciples, are now the ones who proclaim by our lives "***Christ our Light***", and in doing so, we help to dispel the darkness all around us---the darkness of suffering, of hatred, of violence, of division, and of selfishness.

May this Flame of Faith---this Light of Christ---burn ardently in our hearts, and cause us to share this Love for Jesus with all we meet along the remainder of our life journeys.

God bless you, now and always!