

The Resurrection of the Lord

At the Easter Vigil in the Holy Night of Easter

March 26, 2016 8:30 p.m. St. Augustine Cathedral

What a great pleasure it is to be celebrating this “Night of all Nights” with all of you here in our Cathedral this evening. This most sacred Night celebrates the greatest Feast of the Year: the Resurrection of our Risen Lord---and it fills our hearts with joy!

It is with that same joy that I wish all of you a very blessed, joyful and Glorious Easter. And after 40 days of silence, we proclaim once more the Easter Acclamation: “*Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!*”

When all is said and done, what we are celebrating on this most sacred night is the powerful love of God for us, His holy people.

Because of this holy night, fear from darkness is dispelled by the light---human sorrow is transformed into joy---the oppression of sin’s hold on humanity is crushed, and the power of death is destroyed!

That is all because of what we just experienced in the powerful liturgy of the New Light in the first part of our Easter Vigil, as we lit the New Fire, and then watched the Light of Christ carried through this dark church, with the glow of that Light spreading to all of us here.

And that experience of God’s amazing love for us continued on in the dramatic accounts from God’s Holy Word from the Book of Genesis, Exodus, the Prophet Isaiah, and St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans we heard proclaimed in the Liturgy of the Word in the second part of tonight’s Vigil---most especially the Gospel passage we just heard from St. Luke’s account of the first Easter morning. The holy women who were making their way to the tomb of their dead Lord, Jesus, found the tomb open and empty, and as St. Luke describes it so well, *as they were puzzling over this, behold two men in dazzling garments (Angels) appeared to them and said: “Why do you seek the Living One among the dead? He is not here; He has been raised.”*

That very first Easter proclamation stunned the holy women---they didn’t know what to make of it. They struggled with this new reality that, humanly speaking, made no sense. And when they ran back from the Empty Tomb to tell the Apostles what they had just found, St. Luke tells

us, “*their story seemed like nonsense and they did not believe them.*” The closest we get in this passage to a joyful reaction is that Peter ran to the tomb to verify what the women had just told them. When he found exactly the same thing, St. Luke tells us that “*he was amazed*”. What it doesn’t say is that “he believed”, nor that he was joyful.

The empty tomb and Jesus’ missing Body was too upsetting----it made no sense because they were reacting at the human level. Humanly speaking, it made no sense that someone who was dead could now be alive. That had never happened in the history of the world. So, it couldn’t be----or could it?

As the Apostles and the holy women continued to stick together, and as they tried to wrap their minds around this new reality, and as they began to remember what Jesus had said before He died, and of course when they began to see Jesus appearing to them alive, their faith began to grow.

For many of us, this is the 3rd time we’ve been to church in three days---we have been celebrating the Sacred Triduum of Holy Thursday, Good Friday and now the Easter Vigil of Holy Saturday. Over these three days, we have been celebrating everything that is special and sacred to us as people who believe in Jesus as our Lord and Savior. For many in the world----maybe even some of our own family members or friends/neighbors----these last three days have been just “business as usual”, and Easter Sunday means no more than a reason to have an Easter Egg Hunt or eat chocolate bunnies.

But not for us. While we may also do those things with our families and friends tomorrow, what we are doing here----what we have been doing over these three sacred days---is what is most important to us: to renew and deepen our faith---to recommit ourselves to being faithful and enthused about our faith----and to give thanks to God for what Easter really means: the greatest sign there is of God’s unconditional love for us, His holy people.

And so very soon we will focus on the third part of our Easter Vigil as we move into the Liturgy of Baptism. For most us here this evening, who have been baptized all of our lives, our growth in faith has been taking place over a long period of time. For others of us----like Patrick, our Catechumen who will be baptized and confirmed in our Catholic faith in just a few minutes---coming to a faith perspective has been more recent. And for still others of us----like Brandy, Taylor, Nathan, Amy, James, Anthony, and Theresa----our seven candidates who were already baptized in some other faith tradition earlier in their lives and who will make a Profession of faith

and be confirmed in the Catholic faith this evening---faith has evolved and come to a new, and deeper, awareness, in recent years.

Besides the eight people becoming new Catholics here this evening, there are close to 200 people throughout our Diocese, and tens of thousands of people throughout the Universal Church, doing the very same thing on this Holy Night---deepening and professing their faith as Catholics in Jesus the Risen Lord

For all of us---whether we have been a Catholic all our lives or for just a few minutes---just being Catholics---people of faith---doesn't mean that we have everything all figured out. As long as we live, we keep growing in our faith, and, we pray, with every Lent that we experience, that every celebration of Easter is even more joyful and makes more sense in terms of the choices and decisions we make in our lives, rather than being "nonsense" to those who do not believe.

We live in a world that is becoming not only "un-friendly" to matters of faith and religion, but outrightly adversarial to faith, morality, and religious practice. While what we celebrate on Easter is Jesus' victory over sin and death---Jesus dispelling the Darkness by the Light of His Resurrection---the fact is that sin and the powers of Darkness continue to wage a battle against those of us who follow Jesus.

As I'm sure we all know from our Religious Ed classes, while the Apostles and the Holy women came to be not only strong in faith and spent their entire lives spreading the faith, most of them suffered and died for the faith as martyrs. For hundreds of years in the early centuries of the Church, there were constant persecutions aimed specifically at Christians. Then for a while there was a certain tolerance toward religion. We were proud to say that our country was one that was actually founded on the very principal of religious freedom. But we are certainly not able to say that any longer.

The forces of darkness have taken on the new clothes of relativism and secularism, equality for all and political correctness, all of which twists and distorts tenets of Catholic doctrine into what becomes interpreted as discrimination, and uses legal persuasion to attempt to restrict the practice of our faith to the confines of a church building.

To choose to follow Jesus as our Lord and Savior fills us with joy as we share in His Victory, but it also aligns us against the same forces of darkness that continue to fight against the power of the Light. And so, while we celebrate this night of all nights, and as we all---whether we are

newly-initiated in the Catholic faith or long-time veterans of the faith----take the occasion to renew our baptismal promises, we will then celebrate the fourth part of this Easter Vigil----the Liturgy of the Holy Eucharist.

Jesus' Resurrection means new and eternal life for us, and it calls ALL of us, as Jesus' followers, to proclaim the joy of Easter to everyone we meet. That's quite a vocation, just like it was for the early Apostles and holy women. As we know, there are many challenges that come our way to try to trip us up---to try to distract or discourage us.

The ONLY way we can be successful is to be constantly in "communion" with Jesus through the Gift of the Holy Eucharist. Jesus has given us Himself as our most precious Gift, under the species of Bread and Wine, which, when transubstantiated in every Mass we celebrate, become His Body and Blood to be our Food and Drink.

When we come to Communion----as our eight brand new sisters and brothers in our Catholic family will do for the first time this evening---we are "in union with" Jesus Himself in the most intimate and real way possible. He gives us Himself to be our nourishment to help us be up to the Calling He has given us to be His joyful followers---He gives us Himself to be our Food for the journey.

It is through the Holy Eucharist that we are able to see the Truth where others see nonsense----that we are able to see the Light when others are blinded by the darkness----that we are able to live up to the challenges of our baptismal promises in the face of a culture that sees no value in anything beyond the here and now. And it is by being in Communion with one another as people of faith, and in Union with Jesus as our Risen Lord, that we are able to proclaim that Jesus is Alive---that Jesus is victorious----that Jesus remains for all of us the Way, the Truth and the Life.

This great Feast of Easter is the greatest sign we have that our God loves us unconditionally, and He has gone even beyond the realm of what is humanly possible to show us that Love. Yes, *This IS the Day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!*

God bless you, now and always!