

Easter Vigil Celebration of the Resurrection of the Lord

April 15, 2017 9:00 p.m. St. Augustine Cathedral

It's really late *at night* for us to be together for worship. On most other nights at this time, I know some of us that would already be thinking about bed time; and some others of you would be thinking about going out for the evening.

But this is no ordinary night, is it? This is not only a special night, but as we heard proclaimed in the **Exultet**, which Msgr. Osborn sang for us so beautifully this evening when the Light of this Easter Candle and the candles of all of us---those baptized into Christ---made this Cathedral a-glow with Light, this is **the** Night. In fact we heard that "*this is the Night....*" Seven different times.

Why? Because "sin" has been conquered by Love. Or, again, as the Exultet put it, "*the necessary sin of Adam*" and his "*happy fault*" has been "*destroyed completely by the Death of Christ*".

It sounds odd to those who are not Christian that we, gathered here, and those Christian Catholics who gather in chapels, churches and cathedrals around the world this night and tomorrow, to say that we celebrate Christ's Death, as we did yesterday on Good Friday. But we only celebrate His Death because tonight and tomorrow we celebrate His Resurrection.

As the Exultet's Prayer also states so beautifully, as it is addressed to our Loving God, Easter is the "*wonder of Your (God's) care for us---a Love, a charity, beyond all telling, to ransom a slave You gave away Your Son.*"

And so we come together on this late night, this holy night, this "*truly blessed Night*" to rejoice in God's Love, to give thanks that Christ's Death has conquered the power of sin and death, and to rejoice in hope restored and renewed by Jesus' Resurrection, as we proclaim, once again, the "*Alleluia's*" which have been silent since Ash Wednesday, more than 40 days ago.

And so along with Msgr. Osborn, Father Marotti, Father Vinh Le, Deacon John and myself, we wish you and all your families a very Happy and Blessed Easter.

As we all know, this unique and beautiful Easter Vigil is made up of four separate but interconnected Liturgies. The first two, which we're just completing, was the Liturgy of the Lucernarium (or the Liturgy of Light), followed by this second, extended Liturgy of the Word. The Baptismal Liturgy will come next, and the Vigil will conclude with the Liturgy of the Eucharist. We already reflected a bit on the Liturgy of the Light, which focuses on the Risen Jesus, Who is the Light of the World. For the next 50 days of the Easter Season, this Easter Candle will stand front and center in all our Masses to be that constant reminder that Jesus' Resurrection conquers all spiritual darkness, including the effects of sin and death. The extended Liturgy of the Word proclaimed God's Word to us from three of the Old Testament Readings, and two from the New Testament, including the Gospel passage recounting the first realization that Jesus had risen from the tomb and is alive---**Alleluia!**

In those Old Testament Readings, we listened to the greatness of God's creation of the world, including the high point of creation---Adam and Eve and the human race. And we heard six different times that God sees His creation as "*good*", and the seventh time, about us human beings, that God saw us as "*very good*". We heard about the Israelites being led right through the midst of the Red Sea as Pharaoh's army was in hot pursuit, and we heard about God's Covenant with His People which is rooted in His unconditional Love for us, and His Word which is living and effective, accomplishing the end for which God sends it. In the first New Testament Reading, we heard St. Paul tell us with great confidence that *if we have died with Christ, (over Whom death no longer has any power), we, who are baptized into Christ, ...shall also live with Him.*

The constant message in these beautiful passages from the Old and the New Testaments is the message of the entire Word of God: God's unconditional Love for us. And despite the fact that human beings broke that covenant in every generation since the beginning of time through sin, and that each of us here has sinned innumerable times in our lives, the Truth is that God's Love overcomes sin through Jesus' Death and Resurrection.

So, is it any wonder that we ring the bells, blow the trumpets, light all the candles, and sing **Alleluia** over and over again, because Jesus has Risen----not just historically, on that original early Easter morning as we heard in St. Matthew's Gospel passage just a few minutes ago, but Jesus IS Risen----past, present and future; He has reconciled the world; Hope is restored---**Alleluia!**

That's why we heard both the Angel and the Risen Jesus repeat the same instruction to the women who, St. Matthew described as "*both fearful and overjoyed*" as they ran to tell this Good News to the Apostles: "*Do not be afraid!*".

There are a lots of things going on in each of our lives that can cause us to be concerned about many things: worries about our own or our loved ones' health----uncertainty about decisions we have to make about our future---or the constant financial fears that are always there. And when we look at the world situation, there are certainly many legitimate worries from terrorism, to tensions among world powers, to a growing attack against religious freedom and religion in general.

Notice that Jesus didn't say "Don't have any concerns or worries"; He said "Do not be afraid!" *That* sums up the Easter message: "*He is Risen---Do not be afraid*"---**Alleluia!**

St. Paul reminds us why there is no need to fear: "*We who are baptized into Christ are baptized into His death....So, if we have died with Christ, we will live with Him.*" Not forever in *this* world; but for sure, forever in the life of the world to come.

Jesus' Resurrection has eternal consequences in each of our lives, because in Christ, we will live forever. That's why this next part of the Easter Vigil, the Baptismal Liturgy, is so important because we who are baptized will be given the opportunity to renew our Baptismal Promises. We are very happy to welcome into the Church this evening two new Catholics, Lana Hale and Meagan McCormick, who have already been baptized in another Christian faith, and who tonight will make their Profession of Faith in the Catholic Church and receive the Sacrament of Confirmation, and who will also receive Holy Communion with us for the first time. When Lana and Meagan, along with all of us, answer "I Do" to the questions we will be asked, we are deepening our commitment to follow Christ in the world---to live our faith in the world with joy---to stand up for our faith even when it's difficult---and to never be afraid, no matter what we face, because Jesus IS Risen---**Alleluia!**

But our Risen Jesus is so wise and good. He knew that, along with the "fact" of His Resurrection, and in addition to His strong words of encouragement to "*Do not be afraid!*", we also would need something more.....and that is why, on Holy Thursday night, Jesus took Bread and Wine and, in anticipation of His death on Friday and His Resurrection on Sunday, said: "*This is My Body given for you....This cup is the new covenant in My Blood. Do this in Memory of Me.*" The Holy Eucharist, that Lana and Meagan will receive tonight for the first time, and that

the many of the rest of us will receive as we are privileged to do so regularly, is what gives us the spiritual strength to do what God's Word asks of us, to faithfully live our Baptismal Promises with conviction and enthusiasm, and to face whatever our personal circumstances are and whatever the social problems or political tensions of our world may be, and to "*not be afraid*".

Why? Because of this most special and truly blessed Night! Because the Light of Christ dispels all darkness! Because God's Word is effective and accomplishes the end for which He speaks it. Because our Baptism into Christ brings us new and eternal life. Because the Eucharist gives us strength and nourishment to live the Good News of Jesus. And ALL of that because:

Jesus IS Risen---He is TRULY Risen----Alleluia!