

Easter Sunday for Year ABC - 'As Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glory, we too 'are called 'to live a new life'.

April 9, 2023.

Happy Easter my dear brothers and sisters in Christ. As I mentioned last Sunday, the Solemn Easter Vigil, is the climax of the Holy Week. From the weeping and mourning of Good Friday **"Behold the wood of the Cross, on which hung the salvation of the world. Come, let us adore."** to this most holy night, the great vigil of Easter, the mother of all Vigils. For this is the Passover of the Lord, in which, by hearing his Word and celebrating his Sacraments, we share in his victory over death. In this Vigil, there are nine readings, seven from the Old Testament and two from the New (the Epistle and Gospel). Some readings are omitted sometimes but the reading of Exodus (14:15-15:1 with its canticle) should never be omitted. The celebration of the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ is the fundamental event for our Christian community, just as the Passover/Exodus event was and is the fundamental event for the Jews. The events of the Triduum are closely tied to the stories of Passover/Exodus. That's why the reading of the story of the Exodus cannot be omitted. Our Jewish friends don't just hold a memorial when they celebrate Passover. Rather, they take part in the saving acts of those events. In the same way, we Christians don't just hold a memorial of the Last Supper when we celebrate the Eucharist, but rather, Jesus becomes present for us in the bread and wine. For us Christians, we might ask ourselves tonight: "Why is this night so different from every other night?"

On this night, we are told, we are freed from our bondage. And it brings joy to those who mourn. Who among us does not mourn tonight? We mourn for those we love but see no more, especially due to the pandemic; we mourn for the lost opportunities of our lives, for the sins that weigh us down. No matter what burden we carry with us this night, joy can be ours, because this night really is different from any other night. And finally, we are told that this night drives out hatred, fosters peace, and brings down the mighty. What an exchange that is! Pride and hatred have done enough damage in our lives, haven't they? Who needs them? Especially if we can trade them in, if we can just give them to God and receive peace in their place. On this night, when things of heaven are wed to those of earth, and divine to the human. That is really what God offers us tonight. We are bound to the earth, but God invites us to be citizens of heaven. We may have wandered far astray, but God calls us to be reconciled. "Come home!" God says to us. Christ is risen! And we are delivered from the gloom of sin; we are restored to grace and holiness of life. And the beautiful finale of the Exsultet:

Therefore, O Lord, we pray you that this candle, hallowed to the honour of your name, may persevere undimmed, to overcome the darkness of this night. Receive it as a pleasing fragrance, and let it mingle with the lights of heaven. May this flame be found still burning by the Morning Star: the one Morning Star who never sets, Christ your Son, who, coming back from death's domain, has shed his peaceful light on humanity, and lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen". Before the Easter Vigil, the Priest blesses the fire prepared outside the church and then he lights the paschal candle from the new fire, saying: **"May the light of Christ rising in glory dispel the darkness of our hearts and minds."** The Priest then lights his candle from the flame of the paschal candle and the parishioners light theirs from the priest's. Then the Exsultet or Easter Proclamation, is sung. It starts with a joyful, spirit uplifting, faith reburning, hope and love restoring overture after 40 days of gloom and darkness.

The readings are then proclaimed. Before the Epistle, in Catholic practice, the Gloria is sung. The organ and church bells are ringing. The lights of the Church previously left off, are turned on as the Gloria begins. The lit Paschal candle reminds us that Christ is risen indeed. It is used to bless the baptismal font to be used in the celebration of the sacrament. The Great Alleluia is sung before the Gospel is read, Alleluia being used for the first time since Ash Wednesday. People who have completed their RCIA training are given the Sacraments of Christian initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, and the Holy Eucharist). The Easter Vigil is an especially appropriate day for Holy Baptism. The liturgy is dramatic, long and rich. It appeals to all our senses: from darkness into light, from quiet remembrance to thundering of the bells, from the smell of charcoal fire to the aromatic incense filling

the entire church, announcing the joyous good news of the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We are all singing Alleluia! Christ is Risen and he is risen indeed!! This drama confronts every human weakness and limitation. Mankind's choice of sin was a choice of death but is reversed by God's choice of redemption and life. We are freed from the bondage of sin, we are dead no more, but alive in the Lord. The sign of our acceptance of the Life of the Lord is our baptism and living our baptismal commitment. Death is no more. God's love triumphed. Our Lord Jesus Christ submits to the Father's will to die for our sins, save us from damnation and rise again to give us hope of eternal life.

But how about those who have never been baptized? What happened to the just Jew, like Martin Buber, or the spiritual Hindu, like Mohatma Ghandi, or the moral, humanitarian atheist, like so many we all know? Do they have no future after death? In the Good Friday celebration, we prayed for these people in the ancient petitions. Why did we pray for them? If they have no spiritual life, then they are dead. But, they are not dead. Our faith teaches us that Jesus descended to the dead after his death on the cross. He called forth from death those who desired to do what was right and good, people of good will, who by choosing to be moral were therefore choosing to have union with God no matter what concept of God they had. Theologians have a name for their salvation. They call it **Baptism of Desire - happiness in hope**. St. Augustine loved that phrase, happiness in hope. He used it in his greatest work, The City of God, to describe the Christian attitude in life. It is true that we have to do everything possible to bring peace and justice to the world, this is our way of serving Christ's presence in the poor and downtrodden. We certainly have to protect the lives of those who have been conceived but have not yet been born. It is true that we have to fight to end poverty in our country and in our world. We cannot turn our backs on people who are suffering, not just in our own country but around the world. We have to demand that those in leadership use their authority justly, even, dare I say, in a Christ like way. And yet, we know that in the end, our society cannot provide lasting happiness for anyone. The society of man can only provide lasting happiness if it is united to God, if it is a City of God. We Christians have as our happiness the hope of eternal life. Easter is the celebration of hope. Our hope is that we will share in the fullness of the New Life Jesus won for us through His suffering and death.

Brothers and Sisters, Christ was raised so we can share His New Life. We need to grasp on to our faith with both hands. Only our faith brings sanity and meaning and purpose to our life. Sickness and death, turmoil, unemployment, and all sorts of other crises enter our life, but our faith gets us through because despite the suffering we have happiness in hope. No one can take the Risen Saviour from us. No one and no situation, no matter how terrible, can take His Presence from us. This is the Gift of Easter Sunday! This is the central mystery of our redemption. Christ's victory at Easter breaks all the chains of sin we have ever made for ourselves. We have entered the spiritual. Our life is hidden with Christ in God. May our spiritual life have an infinite precedence over our physical life. May the life of the Risen Lord flow through our veins, so that every thought, word and deed of our life may shout out: Jesus Lives! And may we all be happy in the hope of eternal life. This light of Christ comes into the darkness of our world to give us hope for a greater future if we reverse our sinful ways by rising above the things that keep us entombed and imprisoned and become people of the resurrection. Let's all light a candle at home this night and let it shine continually to drive away all darkness. Let it be the light at the end of the tunnel. Let it be the undimmed light of faith and hope. Amen.