

# Easter Vigil 2014

## Introduction

As a very young priest, I served under a good pastor. Yet in his kindness, he made a serious mistake. He allowed me to plan and celebrate the Easter Vigil when I had been a priest less than a year.

It turned out to be a rainy evening but I was undeterred. I gathered as many as I could into the large entry way of a fairly new and modern church building. And there I lit the new fire – as big a fire as I would lit had we been outside! I can still see the look of horror on the pastor's face as he saw the flames nearly licking the ceiling. I was thinking of new life in Christ; he was thinking he'd have to build a new church!

Thirty-six years later, I hope I would be more prudent about lighting fires in church buildings. But I can assure you that my enthusiasm for what is unfolding in this Cathedral tonight remains undiminished!

Since a long ceremony calls for a short homily, let me briefly summarize what I hope each of us will take away from this splendid night of grace. All of it can be summed up by answering two questions: What is this all about? And what is expected of us?

## What's This All About?

If someone who never heard of Christianity were to walk up the main aisle of this Cathedral and ask us, "What's this all about?" – what answer would we give?

I hope we could say, simply, this is all about Jesus Christ, our Savior, who died on the Cross to save us from our sins and rose from the grave so that we share in God's eternal life and joy.

Perhaps we'd go on to tell him that the new fire symbolizes the spark of God's love amid the darkness of evil, sin, and death. We'd say that the paschal candle points to Christ the pillar of fire who leads us through the darkness of sin to the new life of grace. We'd tell our visitor that the Old Testament readings were chosen so we'd be reminded that God created in his image, put in us a deep desire for his love, reached out to us when we rejected his love through sin, and send signals that he would send us a Redeemer, namely Jesus.

We would also tell our visitor that the New Testament readings take us to the heart of why we're here tonight: The Gospel tells us that Jesus who took upon himself our sins died on the Cross and rose triumphant from the tomb. In this way, Jesus overcame our sins and even death itself, making it possible for all of us to be the friends of God, now & for all eternity. We might also tell guest why we read the passage from St. Paul. He tells us that by Baptism we actually share in Christ's death and resurrection. Baptism is like burying our sins at sea; it involves dying with Christ, dying to ourselves and to our sins and rising up out of the water made new, bearing in ourselves the imperishable life of the Trinity.

If our visitor were to ask us, well, what happens next? We'd say that some of us will be baptized, confirmed, and receive Holy Communion for the first time. Others who are already baptized will become fully members of the Church through the sacraments of confirmation and first Eucharist. We'd also tell him that everyone who is already fully a member of the Church will be asked to renew their baptismal promises, to live as disciples of the Lord in the community of the Church. We'd add that afterwards, we'll celebrate the Eucharist with greatest joy, holding in our hands and in our hearts the crucified and risen Lord, our Redeemer!

### **What Should Be Our Response?**

First, we should be joyful! In his beautiful exhortation, "The Joy of the Gospel" - Pope Francis tells us that the Gospel of Christ is "radiant with joy!" and urges us to make that joy evident to people all around us. Or, as St. Theresa of Avila famously said, "God deliver us from gloomy saints!"

Second, we should warmly welcome those who are baptized & received into the Church. Dear sisters and brothers, we rejoice that you are with us! You are living signs of Jesus, truly risen and living in our midst. May you find in this Cathedral parish and in this Archdiocese a spiritual home where you can grow in holiness, serve those in need, and bear witness to Gospel!

Third, we should remember that every gift brings with it responsibility. Jesus, who shares his risen life with us through baptism, calls us to live differently. This new kind of life, a life faith, worship, virtue, and service, is expressed in the baptismal promises that each one of us has made. The Lord expects us to live up to those

promises so that we may grow in his love, a love we hope one day to share fully in heaven.

### **Conclusion**

My warm congratulations to those about to be baptized and welcomed into the life of the Church. I urge you, their sponsors, to help them by word and example to lead a good and active Christian life as members of the Church. And on this night of nights, I invite all of us to open our hearts as never before to the Risen Lord and to the joy of the Gospel.

May God bless us and keep us always in His love!