

Easter Vigil Homily

An ancient homily, probably from the 2nd century and reflecting upon the depressing mood, the tangible grief that enveloped the hearts of the apostles hours after the death and burial of Jesus says of Holy Saturday:

Something strange is happening—there is a great silence on earth today, a great silence and stillness. The whole earth keeps silence because the king is asleep. The earth trembled and is still because God has fallen asleep in the flesh... God has died in the flesh and hell trembles with fear.

The author was trying to convey the magnitude of the sadness, the depth of the anguish of those hours. What hopes those first followers of Jesus had harbored.

He was the way. But now with his body buried deep into the earth, the way, the road was destroyed.

He was the truth. Not only because of the words he spoke while among his own, but because in this Word incarnate were spoken all the truths of every conceivable time and world. Now Truth itself—every semblance of reason, was silenced, muted in the hushed, sterile subsoil of fallen creation.

He was the life. Infinite, irrepressible life that existed before the world began. He took on human flesh, gave joy at Cana's marriage feast and the funeral feast of Lazarus. Suddenly, all that hope for life was gone, disappeared forever, unless God had, inconceivably, other plans.

And God did.

Something strange happened then and is happening here, now, this night. Listen to the startling news proclaimed to the three women by an unknown young man sitting alone in the vacant tomb, and with them ponder his unfathomable words:

"Do not be amazed! You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Behold the place where they laid him. But go and tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you.'"

On this single, most important liturgical celebration of the Church year, brimming

over in rich sacramental symbol, the Church from ancient days, calls upon nature's most basic elements—open air, fire, water, light and darkness—to emphasize the cosmic dimensions of Christ's Resurrection. In her readings, she revisits the momentous events in salvation history such as have led up to this night—creation and the Passover exodus, for example—to insist that this night is the culmination of those saving events and the fulfillment of all God's promises.

And she proclaims again and again in different words and signs—He is risen—a message, a proclamation meant to challenge anew the faith of each one of us. A message and proclamation embraced this night by Chandra Groves and Elisha Hawk who in receiving Baptism will radiate the new risen life and joy of Christ for all of us.

Others are present who have been baptized, but who have realized that from the very beginning, the fullness of Gospel faith has subsisted in the Catholic Church. These will be fully received into our Catholic family this night:

Daphne Daly
Mollie Howerton
Laruen Judisky
Shawna Maas
Meghan Sisk

All these will then receive the Sacrament of Confirmation and rejoice in their first Holy Communion.

What an example you candidates and catechumens are to so many of us cradle Catholics, to us who are challenged by the light of this paschal candle to enkindle the fire of faith gifted to us years ago. We are bolstered by your enthusiasm and your faith as all of us renew our own Baptismal promises.

Yes, for all of us here, "This is the night when Jesus Christ broke the chains of death and rose triumphant from the grave." The "Night truly blessed when heaven is wedded to earth and we are reconciled to God."

Yes, on this night of eternal life, we are sacramentally one with that earliest, apostolic Church and with the faithful throughout the world in experiencing the

presence of the Risen Christ. We join cosmic creation in thanking God for that “happy fault, that necessary sin of Adam which gained for us so great a Redeemer.”

He is risen! How it happened was never a question for believers—not even a curiosity. But that it happened! How many millions since have staked their lives on it!

As we do, this holy evening.

Alleluia!