

Easter Vigil/Vigilia Pascual

Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart

Queridos elegidos,
Hermanos y hermanos en Cristo,

En esta santísima noche, la que vio a Jesús resucitando de la muerte, me alegra darles la bienvenida más calorosa a todos y todas. Es un gozo celebrar con ustedes la Vigilia Pascual. Acogemos especialmente los elegidos que se van a bautizar. Reconocemos con gratitud a sus padres, padrinos y familiares. La presencia de estos candidatos nos invita a todos a profundizar las promesas de nuestro bautismo.

Tal vez el evangelio de esta noche nos deje un poquito perplejo, aun desilusionados. Así como acompañamos las mujeres al jardín muy cerca a Gólgota para celebrar el primer día de una nueva creación, nos quedamos asombrados ante un sepulcro vacío. Puede ser que ésta sea una experiencia ambigua. ¿Qué pensar?

El evangelio según San Mateo nos informa que, al ver los ángeles a la entrada de la tumba, las mujeres corrían a casa, llenas de temor y alegría. Por el camino se encontraron con Cristo resucitado. Ellas se lo acercaron, lo abrazaron los pies y lo adoraron. Entonces les dijo Jesús: "No tengan miedo. Vayan a decir a mis hermanos que se dirijan a Galilea. Allí me verán".

Puesto que sabemos que la historia no acabó allí y de verdad se volvió mejor, podemos creer que este cuento de los primeros momentos de la primera Pascua nos enseña algo bien importante. A presentarnos con una historia todavía incompleta, la Palabra de Dios nos invita entrar en un evento que continúa hoy en vez de recordar un dato desde el pasado lejano.

Por nuestra observancia de Semana Santa, hemos caminado con Jesús en sus últimas horas y hemos visto aparentemente el triunfo del mal. Ayer oímos Jesús gritó su última palabra: "todo está cumplido" y vimos cómo sus amigos retiraron su cuerpo y lo pusieron en un sepulcro. Ahora acompañamos a las mujeres y luego volvemos con Pedro a un sepulcro vacío, una escena de ausencia que se parezca peor que ayer.

Este Evangelio, cómo todos los cuentos de la Resurrección, nos aconseja contra una fe demasiado fácil – pensar que lo que sucedió en la Pascua fuera una receta facilísima contra el mal. De veras se ha comenzado una nueva creación, pero nos cuesta tiempo y esfuerzo para comprender toda su belleza. Los primeros discípulos no entendían todo en un instante, tampoco nosotros.

Recuerden lo que San Pablo escribió a los romanos. Parecía que los romanos hayan olvidado el sentido de su bautismo y el vínculo con la resurrección de Jesús:

¿Acaso no saben ustedes que todos los que fuimos bautizados para unirnos con Cristo Jesús, en realidad fuimos bautizados para participar en su muerte? Por tanto, mediante el bautismo fuimos sepultados con él en su muerte, a fin de que, así como Cristo resucitó por el poder del Padre, también nosotros llevemos una vida nueva.

Para la mayoría de nosotros, esa muerte y ese entierro nos pasaron hace mucho tiempo. Para los niños y jóvenes elegidos aquí presentes, ese evento trascendental se les sucederá en unos pocos momentos. Estos hermanos y hermanas serán enterrados con Cristo y luego se resucitarán a una vida completamente nueva. El bautismo de ellos nos invita a todos a revivir nuestros propios y profesar con corazones renovados nuestra renuncia a las tinieblas y su Príncipe, así como nuestra creencia en la Santísima Trinidad y en la Iglesia, el Cuerpo místico de nuestro Señor resucitado.

Al mismo tiempo, la Palabra de Dios nos invita a abrir los ojos a los signos inesperados de la presencia de Cristo en la misericordia, el perdón y una visión que va más allá de nuestras expectativas terrenales. Tenemos los próximos 50 días para celebrar y seguir luchando para entender el significado de la Pascua. La Sagrada Escritura continuará a invitarnos a conocer al Señor resucitado.

¡A Él sea la gloria, ahora y para siempre... Amen!

Dear elect,
Dear brothers and sisters in Christ

By now I am sure we have all figured it out: there are no shortcuts in this Vigil. The fact is that the very length of the Vigil makes us wait and wait. We watch and, more importantly, we listen. Then we will decide what we will believe; what we will do.

We watch and we listen. Scripture is both an account of the Creator's history with his creatures, and his gracious communication of what is good for the participants in that history. The first three readings selected for tonight, the mother of all the vigils of the Church, draw our attention to the first feature: the Creator's history with his creatures.

We listened to a cavalcade of vivid images: the exuberant abundance of the creation story and the judgment of the Creator, who pronounces it all to be good. Then there is the dramatic, just-in-the-nick-of-time rescue of Isaac, who lies bound and mute, waiting to be slaughtered. At the heart of the stories from the Old Testament is the deliverance of the people of Israel, told with cinematographic flair on the wide screen of our imagination – and with Dolby sound.

In the final reading from the Old Testament, God speaks through the prophet Isaiah urging us to pay attention to what is happening here! Seek the Lord while he may be found! Call to him, while he is still near.

Throughout these stories, God seems to be asking: “Are you able to trust this? How much do you trust me?” “Be my people and I will be your God,” God keeps repeating.

Tonight the liturgy is counting on us to fill in an important blank: despite God’s gracious communication of what is good for men and women, at some point we said no. We will choose from what tree to eat, we will fashion gods after our own likeness, ones that are deaf and mute and easy to manipulate. We will not be your people.

We will run away from your Word made flesh. We will deny that we even know him. We will nail him to a cross.

Tonight we celebrate the *felix culpa*, the “happy fault”, the truth that we do not have final say about our fate. And so we listen for another Word.

It comes in the Gospel: “He is not here, for he has been raised just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.”

None of the gospels relates the actual resurrection, that is, the rising of Jesus from the dead. There are two reasons for this. First, no one was present to witness it. There were witnesses of the empty tomb and his appearances, but these are the aftermath of the resurrection, not the event itself. Secondly, resurrection is transformation into an entirely new mode of existence – not just some sort of resuscitation to the old life. Perhaps this is the reason why no one immediately recognizes the Risen One. He takes the initiative, greeting, speaking, welcoming and breaking the bread; then their eyes are opened. He performs the same actions here tonight.

Tonight all of us are summoned before an empty tomb. Not everyone who has been there before us has reached the same conclusion. If we continue to read Matthew’s Gospel, we will immediately hear of some who peer into the tomb and arrive at a different judgment, the original version of the so-called “Passover Plot”: “His disciples came by night and stole him while we were asleep.”

We hear, instead: “He is not here, for he has been raised just as he said.”

The Church which has believed this proclamation can now proceed to baptize, to renew its baptismal promises and to celebrate the paschal Eucharist, in all of which the past (Christ’s death and resurrection) is brought from the past into the present, and the future coming of Christ is anticipated.

But we heard one other reading tonight and, because its language is more prosaic than the other accounts, we risk missing its crucial content. The reading from the Letter to the Romans marks the decisive turning point in tonight's vigil. The basic sign of the liturgy lies in the experience of this turning point, which is signified tonight in various ways: as the passing from darkness to light, from death to life, from bondage to freedom, from the old age to the age to come. This transition, accomplished in our own baptism, is possible for us because Christ first made it. But it has to be renewed constantly.

Do you remember how Paul put it? All the verbs that speak of our dying with Christ are in the past tense: we who were baptized...have died with Christ and were indeed buried with him. Our dying with Christ has been accomplished, once and for all, in baptism. The verbs that speak of our resurrection look to the future, which depends on our obedience to him: we believe that we shall also live with him...living for God in Christ Jesus.

Our dying with Christ to sin has to be renewed by a daily decision. Thus the Letter to the Romans prepares us for the solemn renewal of our baptismal vows, a decision that has to be expressed in a decision each day to live in union with him.

This vigil invites us to make one more transition, one that is particularly critical these days: the transition from fear to joy. Only if we make this final conversion will we be motivated to carry the Good News to our sisters and brothers.

Though the fire we lit at the beginning of this celebration is now nothing more than a few glowing embers, something has been enkindled here tonight, a light more faithful than the morning star which never sets. Jesus has come back from the dead and shed his peaceful light on the human race, the same light that embraces the men and women across the Archdiocese who tonight are reborn in baptism. This is the Light we had been hoping for.

Christ our Passover has been sacrificed. With joy let us keep the feast!