

## **Easter Vigil A + 4 April 2026+ Rom 6:3-11 + Mt 28:1-10**

Over the last 3 days, we have been considering how the Lord's Passover can be summed up by St. John's magnificent words: He loved us *to the end*. On Holy Thursday, we contemplated how Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet was a perfect image of the love He showed us in His earthly ministry. On Good Friday, we saw how the Lord's love is made most fully known on His Cross, and where the Eucharist receives its redemptive power.

In our Gospel today, the women who came to tend to the Lord's tomb were not expecting things as they found them. They had hoped Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the long-awaited Messiah, but now He is dead. So we can only imagine the shock of their lives when they felt *a great earthquake; [and] an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, approached, rolled back the stone, and sat upon it!* No wonder the guards who had been posted to make sure no one stole Jesus' dead body *were shaken with fear of him and became like dead men!*

But the angel's first words to the women echo back to the annunciation of the Angel Gabriel to Mary: *do not be afraid!* From the moment of His incarnation to His resurrection, Jesus turns fear into joy. Just as Mary *rejoiced* in the good news of the Lord's incarnation (Lk 1:47), so Matthew notes the women literally run back to tell the good news to the Eleven, *fearful yet overjoyed*. And *behold, Jesus met them on their way and greeted them!* He is alive! There is no other possible explanation. After all of our waiting, we finally see the fruit of the Lord's love to the end: resurrection! In the resurrection, we finally understand the meaning of Jesus' image of true love in John's Gospel where He says, *unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit* (12:24).

In this one word, *resurrection*, all of our longings for love and life are fulfilled. Without it, death marks the definitive sealing of the tomb of a painful and ultimately meaningless existence. But on account of the resurrection, everything now has meaning. Everything can be redeemed! Death no longer has the last word. So St. Paul writes in our Epistle, *We know that Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more; death no longer has power over him.*

We could spend the rest of our lives pondering the wonder of the love of Christ manifested in His resurrection from the dead. But I think that many people struggle to make tonight's celebration truly *personal*. That is, we may believe with all of our hearts that God truly has loved us to the end. That Jesus truly is the Son of God, and that He truly rose from the dead, never to die again. But this belief remains somewhat 'out there,' in a general sense, failing to pack the punch that we sense it should. Permit me to make an analogy here.

I know that Hawaii exists in a definitive place on this planet. I am sure, on the basis of photos, that it is very beautiful. I'd like to go and visit there someday. I have even met someone who was a 'Navy brat' growing up in Pearl Harbor on that fateful day in December 1941. But all of that seems rather remote, it doesn't make much of a difference in my day-to-day life. Now obviously, even if I never make it to Hawaii, I can live a happy and fulfilled

life. But that's not the case when it comes to the resurrection. And this is so important: just as Jesus didn't die on the Cross for Himself, He didn't rise for Himself. He rose for us. So the resurrection must not be just a piece of data that we store away in our minds—as important as it is. It is meant to be lived, to be experienced, to be the center of our lives, even now.

Listen again to St. Paul in our Epistle: *Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?* He's talking to you! In Baptism, you were, dare I say it, on the Cross with Jesus. But this means you also rose with Him! So St. Paul continues, *if we have grown into union with him through a death like his, we shall also be united with him in the resurrection.* But he's not just talking about the Baptismal Rite that occurred when you were a baby, as deeply important as that was. He's talking about the form of your life, your deepest identity, in every moment of every day.

If you take one word home with you from this homily tonight, let this be it: *we have grown into union with him.* Because that's the goal: not just knowing about Him, but knowing Him. Because He sure knows you, even more than you know yourself! And why is this important? It matters because we want to rise! St. Paul says, *if, then, we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him.*

As a recovering accountant, I fear that many think the Christian life goes something like this: we are born, God gives us a blank book at baptism, he gives us a list of rules, and then keeps a running list of merits and demerits until we die, hoping the plusses outweigh the minuses. But if that were true, why did Christ become man, die and rise? Unfortunately, certain unhelpful protestant theologies are strongly ingrained in the US culture that turn the paschal mystery—the Lord's Passover—into a purely legal transfer. They say: we sinned, God got really mad, and exasperated, He doles out his punishment on His Son in our place. Finally satisfied, He declares us legally righteous, although we are still sinners to the core. I don't know about you, but that's a kind of God I would prefer to keep at a distance.

No! God took a human nature in Jesus Christ, lived, suffered, and died, so that we humans could be intimately united to Him, every moment of our lives, from our first breath, unto the dawn of eternity! And as humans, we are mind, body, and spirit, and so our faith is not just knowing things about God. The Sacraments are ordered to our humanity, as visible, material signs that give invisible grace, allowing us to live in Christ totally—mind, body, and spirit. That's what God's desire is for us! Why? Because He loves us, even to the end!

Now it's true, this is not an easy way of life. It entails now *being dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus.* But if we die, having remained in friendship with Christ, *we believe that we shall also live with him* in glorified bodies for all eternity (and that's even better than Hawaii!) That goes for each of us, personally, and communally as one Body in Christ. And that is truly reason enough for each of us to proclaim tonight, *Alleluia!*