

## Easter Vigil + 30 March 2024 + Mk 16:1-7

In the beginning God was. And He was *a consuming fire*. But it wasn't enough for Him to be perfect within Himself. Love always gives itself away. So out of His great love, He gave from His goodness: He created all that is. And it all began with a Word: *Let there be light*. And it was so. Where darkness once *covered the abyss*, Gods' own light scattered the darkness.

And it was good. Everything God created was good. Above all else, man was good. Male and female were made in God's own image and likeness. But soon enough, that wasn't enough for them. They didn't want to be the image; they wanted to be the source. And so through their pride, darkness came back, with a vengeance. The darkness of sin threatened once again to turn the beauty of creation into an abyss of nothingness.

But God would not allow it to be so. He chose one righteous man from among the nations, to be the source of blessing to the nations. He tested that man by asking of him more than anyone could reasonably expect. But in fact, God knew all along what he would do. He Himself would provide a Lamb of sacrifice. And that man Abraham passed the test. Because of his faith, God promised that Abraham's descendants would number as the *stars in the sky*. A light began to shine again, ever so dimly, amidst the shadows of the night.

It was not easy for Abraham's descendants. The darkness of slavery was so great that they could barely discern any light. They cried out to God, and He heard their prayers. He used the darkness to put their enemies into confusion. *Just before dawn*, God set His people free, through raging waters of the Red Sea. As dawn broke, they set foot on dry ground, toward the Promised Land. And they learned that day to put their trust in the Lord.

But how quickly God's people forgot Him! No sooner did they enter the Promised Land, that they began to worship the false gods. And so each went their own way. The people, once united, were scattered to the desert, left wandering yet again in the darkness of their sin. Without living water, their hearts grew hard. But God couldn't turn His back on His children, despite all the times they turned on Him. Time and again, with great tenderness, He took them back. He offered them the living waters of His word. He revealed to them the way to life, the precepts of God. And He made another promise:

*I will sprinkle clean water upon you to cleanse you from all your impurities. I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you. You shall be my people. And I will be your God.*

But *how long, O Lord*, the people pleaded. How long must we wait for your promise to be fulfilled? When, o Lord, will you rise from your slumber, to have mercy on your children? When will you roll away the stone that covers our dark tomb of sin and death?

*This is the night. This is the night, when once you led our forebears, Israel's children, from slavery in Egypt and made them pass dry-shod through the Red Sea. This is the night, that with a pillar of fire banished the darkness of sin. This is the night, that even now throughout the world, sets Christian believers apart from worldly vices and from the gloom of sin, leading them to grace... This is the night, when Christ broke the prison-bars of death and rose victorious from the underworld.*

At some point during this most holy of nights, everything changed. *Very early when the sun had risen, on the first day of the week, [the women] came to the tomb. When they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back; On entering the tomb they saw a young man... clothed in a white robe, and...He said to them, "Do not be amazed! You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has been raised; he is not here."*

No one saw this coming. The disciples never really got it. According to St John's Gospel, this was because *they did not yet understand the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead.* After all, no one has ever come back from three days, dead in a tomb. It seems almost too good to be true. But it is true. The angel tells the women: *go and tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you.'*

Now we are His disciples. The witnesses announce this good News to us. Yes, the Lamb has been slain. But this Passover Lamb is the perfect sacrifice Whose precious blood has made atonement for our sins. And even sin and death could not overpower Him. He has indeed risen from the dead, and in doing so He has broken down the gates of death. He has accomplished His mission. He has won the victory. And now He shares this victory over sin and death with all of those who die and rise with Him in the waters of Baptism.

And so this night, we recall and renew the promises that we made, or were made on our behalf, at our own baptism. We firmly and resolutely renounce Satan and that slavery to sin. Yes, the journey is hard, but we have caught a glimpse of the Promised Land, and we're never going back to the old life of sin and death. We were buried with [Christ] through baptism...and *our old self of sin was crucified with Him.* And that hurts. But we know that *if we have grown into union with him through a death like his, we shall also be united with him in the resurrection.* And that joyful hope makes all the difference in the world.

But we're not there yet. We are still pilgrims on the way, and we follow Christ our light. He is *the bright morning star*, shining in the darkness of this world. And this mysterious, this sacramental middle-ground of heaven and earth is the Liturgy of the Church. Our Mass tonight is only a preparation, a glimpse of the eternal wedding Supper of the Lamb in heaven, where the Book of Revelation tells us that *we will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be our light, and we shall reign forever* (Rev. 22:5) and ever. Amen!  
Alleluia!