

APRIL 3, 2021
EASTER VIGIL
Mark 16: 1-8

“THE LORD IS RISEN!”

The Lord is Risen! Alleluia! Alleluia! This is our hymn and greetings tonight as we celebrate this Easter Vigil. This Easter Vigil as indicated in the rubrics of the Roman Missal, “is the greatest and most noble of all solemnities”¹ This vigil which means staying up all night “has its roots in the night of Passover when the Israelites stayed awake waiting for the Lord to deliver them. Like them, we gather as a family to tell the stories of our salvation and draw strength from the remembering. The most important thing is to allow the symbols of this night — the light, darkness, Paschal candle, the waters of baptism, the bread of life — to capture our imagination as we wait together in joyful hope for the good news of God's victory over death. In the process we discover for ourselves the glory of the cross.”² Our readings recall the salvation history from the Book of Genesis to the fulfillment of our redemption. We know that the Word of God is our life and from there we are inspired, called to act, and do the will of God the Father proclaimed and manifested through His Son Jesus Christ, the Word who became flesh. In our gospel, we recall the holy women, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome who “very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb.”³ When they found that His body was not there and “saw a young man, dressed in a white robe who said to them ‘Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.’”⁴ Our readings give us hope and joy because the Word of God was accomplished. This Easter

¹ The Roman Missal p. 323

² www.ncronline.org

³ Mark 16: 2 NRSV Catholic Bible Press USA

⁴ Mark 16: 6-7 NRSV Catholic Bible Press USA

Vigil has a lot of liturgical meaning – essential in our daily lives as we journey and deepen our faith. We recall that “Friday's liturgy ended in silence. Tonight's service begins in darkness. We often forget Holy Saturday, the Day of the Lord's Entombment, a day clothed in darkness and despair. Imagine the sadness and despair of the disciples on that day. Their dream had been shattered and they watched their friend, the one in whom they had put their hope, die a horrible death. So, we begin the Easter Vigil, by allowing ourselves to sit in the darkness and gather into our hearts all those places in our hearts that long for the Light of Christ. As the Easter candle is carried in solemn into the darkened church, the priest/deacon proclaims the words, "Christ, Our Light!" and the assembled community responds, "Thanks be to God!" As everyone's candles are lit, we hear the first proclamation of Easter in the *Exsultet*, a song of joy and exultation. The music is joyful but solemn compared to the exuberant joy of the "Glory to God" and "Gospel Alleluia." As we imagine the church filled with candlelight and faces waiting in quiet hope, we sing the triumph of God's mighty love. The Easter Vigil liturgy, as it was originally imagined, is a night watch harkening back to the night the Israelites stayed awake in vigil waiting for the Lord to deliver them from their slavery in Egypt. Like they did, we tell the stories of our salvation beginning with the story of Creation and culminating for us in the story of Easter morning. Between each of the Vigil scripture readings we respond with a psalm. The psalms are the prayers of humanity coming before God, reaching out to God, with praise, repentance, thanksgiving, or lament. This psalm response combines several of the psalms used during the Easter Vigil liturgy, an expression of the wonder of this night. Within the structure of the Vigil Liturgy of the Word, the "Glory to God" is traditionally inserted immediately at the conclusion of the readings from the Jewish Old Testament. As both a preparation and announcement of the New Testament scriptures, we now sing with a level of joy we've not yet expressed on this holy night. Imagine yourself being able to dance the joy of this age-old hymn that proclaims God glory. The church has always considered the proclamation of the gospel

scripture to be one of the high points of any liturgy. To set this scripture apart from the rest, we sing the Gospel Acclamation, the "Alleluia," to announce the reading. Today is even more special because we are about to proclaim the Easter story itself, the announcement of God's victory over sin and death. Much like a trumpet fanfare, the acclamation rouses us to pay attention and to pay attention what what's about to happen. This is the heart of our faith. (After the homily, follows the Baptismal Liturgy, the blessing of water and renewal of baptismal promises.) Dating back to the early tradition of the church, Easter was the day when new members were welcomed into the community by baptism (which we don't have tonight). The symbols of baptism permeate the Vigil liturgy. This is the time when the catechumens would make their profession of faith. It was also the time when the entire community is invited to renew their baptismal promises and make their profession of faith along the newly baptized. We are invited now to make those promises again and profess the faith we share. (Finally, the Preparation of the Gifts and the Eucharistic Prayer). This solemn prayer marks the high point of the entire liturgy. The documents of the church call this prayer 'the center and summit of the entire celebration.' It's called the Eucharistic Prayer from the Greek word *eucharistia*, which means to give thanks and praise. Everything in this night's liturgy up till now has been leading us up to this moment where we proclaim our thanks and praise to a God who has blessed us with such abundance even in the midst of our darkness and brokenness. And so, together we lift our hearts in thanksgiving."⁵

We end this Easter Vigil with sending off the faithful with 'Go forth, the Mass is ended, alleluia, alleluia!' in which we all respond: 'Thanks be to God, alleluia, alleluia!' This is now our part, to proclaim to the whole world that Christ is risen! This is now our mission to share the Gospel of joy to everyone by living it everyday of our lives. Like the holy women, we need to live and proclaim it to all the whole world. So, my brothers and

⁵ www.ncronline.org

sisters, “this is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it!”⁶ Let us all be witnesses of the resurrection, let us all be Easter people – joyful, happy, and hopeful.

In behalf of Fr. Jonathan, Deacons Stephen and Tom, and our staff, I would like to greet you Happy Easter and may the Risen Lord continue shower you with endless blessings! Amen. Alleluia, alleluia!

⁶ Psalm 118: 24 NRSV Catholic Bible Press USA