

Easter Vigil

Holy Saturday is a special day in our liturgical year. It is a day that is meant to be quiet, a time of waiting and prayer, a time of anticipation. Jesus' lifeless body is lying in the tomb. The disciples, along with Mary the Mother of Jesus, are in the upper room. The door is locked, and they are hiding in fear. They are exceedingly sad and brokenhearted, especially Mary, for just one day before Jesus died on the cross. It is like the darkness of death had descended upon all of them. This is what we recall on Holy Saturday. We are asked to wait and pray. We do not wait in fear though because we know the outcome; but we wait in anticipation of the celebration of the great event of the Resurrection. Holy Saturday is a microcosm of the entire season of Lent. The waiting and anticipation, the fasting and praying are all done to prepare us for the Resurrection. We are being brought out of darkness into the light of Christ.

At the conclusion of Holy Saturday we celebrate the Easter Vigil. The Easter Vigil in itself is a microcosm of salvation history. We experience the newly blessed and lit Easter candle coming into a dark church. This represents the light of God coming into the darkness of our world; the light coming into the darkness of death to save us. God wants to share His light with us and allow us to live in His light. We hear the Scripture readings which pertain to God's work of saving His people, from the creation of the world, to saving the Israelites by parting the Red Sea (which is a symbol of baptism), to God giving us a new heart and putting a new spirit within us, up until the paschal mystery of Christ's death and Resurrection. We get to sing the Gloria again, that great hymn of thanksgiving and praise to God for what He has done for us.

We celebrate the Easter sacraments, which are a visible sign of God's grace working in our lives. Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist are the sacraments of initiation. God calls people to be His own. God calls us to be His adopted children. He wants to incorporate us into His divine life in a special way.

St. Paul said it very well, and I would like to repeat his message. "Brothers and sisters: Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life." (Rom 6:3-4) When someone enters into the baptismal font he or she descends into the waters to die to self. That person is baptized into Christ and receives a new life. Sin is washed away. As they ascend out of the water they are a new creation and have been given new life in Christ.

"For if we have grown into union with him through a death like his, we shall also be united with him in the resurrection. . . . If, then, we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him." (Rom 6:5, 8) We have died to a life of sin, and now we live a new life for Jesus. Through the sacraments we belong to God. Through our faith we believe in the resurrection. Just as Holy Saturday anticipates the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday our baptism into Jesus anticipates our resurrection on the last day. The Easter Vigil celebrates all of these things. Come to the waters of baptism – receive new life. Come to the table of the Lord – receive the bread of life and the cup of eternal salvation.

“Exult, let them exult, the hosts of heaven, exult, let Angel ministers of God exult, let the trumpet of salvation sound aloud our mighty King’s triumph!” “This is the night, when Christ broke the prison-bars of death and rose victorious, . . . This is the night that with a pillar of fire banished the darkness of sin. This is the night of which it is written: The night shall be as bright as day. The sanctifying power of this night dispels wickedness, washes faults away, restores innocence to the fallen, and joy to mourners. O truly blessed night, when things of heaven are wed to those of earth, and divine to the human,” because Jesus our Lord has risen victorious and lives forever. Alleluia, alleluia! (Exultant)