

## **Homily for the Easter Vigil, 2016**

*(Three Adult Initiations)*

Easter in history is about resurrection. Easter in the present is about baptismal hope and discipline. Easter for the future is about a new heaven and a new earth. One at a time.

The disciples of the preacher from Nazareth made an extraordinary claim, one contrary to what everyone of their time and every time has known: Once dead, people don't come to life again. We are here because the disciples' claim about Jesus changed the imaginations of countless people in the ancient Mediterranean world, from Spain to Iraq and beyond. Christian communities celebrating Easter around the world today are the latest runners in a relay through time, receiving a message from the past and seeking to pass it forward to those who will follow us in the next generation: Christ is Risen!

So to the present, Easter today. Easter today is about baptism, its wonder and its obligations. The church community does not simply carry the message of Jesus' resurrection as a bare fact: It understands that both message and community will wither unless that community lives in a way that conforms to its message: This is a world in which carpenters-turned-preachers rise from the dead! We are meant for something more than returning to dust. The entire cosmos will not dissolve in heat-death, but has a future of unimaginable wonder! We live in a world in which that preacher's message has been given a "stamp of approval" by the Creator, telling all who would listen that the world – our world, all of it – is a gift, a message of love, an invitation; and that invitation is to be received each moment with awareness, with care, and with gratitude. Baptism is a commitment to a new way of seeing; a commitment to re-educating our emotions; and a commitment to a new way of acting each day. You who will be baptized tonight have prayed and worked over the past months and years to discover and appreciate that the unbelieving world into which we are born is, for all its many good qualities, blind to this one central thing: We, and all creation, are made to respond in love to the Creator-God Who drew us into existence out of love, Who sustains us at every moment out of love, and Who will carry us into a new way of life that we cannot now imagine when all creation is finally freed from the damage caused by sin. And that "one, central thing" is embodied now in the Risen Body of Jesus, the Savior. To appreciate that fact you need not only to hear it; you must reshape your emotional lives to experience the world as a gift, and so choose to live in accord with that awareness of moment-by-moment embrace by Love through Christ.

The community now welcoming you tries to live according to that vision. It does so very imperfectly, as you know already or will soon find out. You will also discover, as we have, that your baptism will not magically change you into a disciple who loves at every moment in response to God's love. It will take a lifetime for you, as it does for each of us, to allow God to change you to the depths of your soul – to change your seeing, your emotions, and your choices. That is why, every Sunday, we repeat with bread and wine the core message of baptism: God is eager to give new life through Christ – but new life at the cost of the sacrifice of our old habits and attachments.

And Easter “for the future”? Our heritage is a confidence that our loving God is remaking all creation, visible and invisible, into one in which all things wholeheartedly love and respond to love. The plants and animals, the stars and the seas of the Genesis reading we heard earlier tonight love him straightforwardly in their simplicity, just by being who their God created them to be. We humans, though, must struggle to know ourselves and to purify ourselves so as to become “love clear through,” as we know we are now not. We believe and we pray that the Powers of the invisible world, also created by God to love and serve Him, need a similar purification to ours – one which has also been guaranteed by the resurrection of the Son of God, Jesus the carpenter, who was always the eternal Son and is now among us raised from the dead.

So Easter past, present, and future offers a vision, a hope, and a task. A vision of our place in the cosmos, a vision that spans from our mundane daily chores to the countless galaxies and other wonders of deep space. All are held in the embrace of a loving God, designed to delight him by responding, each in its way, to his creating and sustaining love. The stars shine for God; the animals scurry for His delight; the birds sing for Him; the flowers open in response to His love. And we – when we choose – respond to His love in our distinctive, human way: with thanks, with joy, and with confidence that our daily struggles to love after His example will, no matter how unlikely it seems, turn out well in the end by His grace. This is our hope, celebrated at Easter and renewed each Sunday at Mass. That the end of all things, including the end of our own time on this planet, is in God’s loving embrace. Our task, rarely easy because we are still so largely blind and insensitive to God’s love, is to learn to see each moment, each bit of creation, as an invitation, an attempt at conversation, offered by the God who raised Jesus, and who will raise us, and who has promised to raise all creation into new life.