

EASTER VIGIL – YEAR B  
“Through the Cross to New Life”  
(Romans 6:3-11; Mark 16:1-8)

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Two confirmed bachelors were sitting and talking about cooking. One said that he got a fancy cookbook once but never did much with it. When asked why by the other, he replied that every recipe started the same way – “Take a clean dish and ...!”

Are you ready for a new life, a fresh start, a clean slate?

Have faith; follow Jesus through the cross, into the tomb, and rise to new life!

The Word of God during our vigil tonight has taken us on a journey from creation, through Abraham’s faith in God to liberation from Egypt. We have been invited to come to the water, and to be open to receiving a new heart and a new spirit.

The powerful Exodus account describes how the Hebrew people were liberated from their cage of political oppression in Egypt. This liberation took place through *flesh and blood* (the paschal lamb they sacrificed); through *water* (the crossing of the Red Sea); and through *death* (the death of the Egyptian soldiers). All this brought political freedom, and the mandate to become the chosen people of God, a people set apart.

The gospel of Luke tonight describes an even more powerful liberation - *victory over sin and death itself*. The women do not find the body of Jesus. Angels remind them how he had predicted his suffering, death and resurrection. They leave, amazed at what happened, not yet understanding or daring to believe.

There are some similarities in this gospel to the Exodus account. This liberation, this victory, also takes place through *flesh and blood* (the Passion of Jesus on the Cross); through *water* (flowing from his side on the Cross); and through *death* (the death of Jesus himself on the Cross). Here the similarity ends, because of his resurrection. What is overcome by the death and resurrection of Jesus is not just political oppression, but the very power of sin and death, darkness and evil itself!

The reading from Romans then teaches us the consequences of resurrection for us. It drives home the message that through baptism and faith in Christ’s death and resurrection, our old selves have been crucified with him so that we are no longer slaves to sin. Think of it - we can be free! We are no longer slaves to our own sin, darkness, defects of character and addictions!

Baptism joins us to Jesus in his death, and joins us to Jesus in his resurrection. We must now consider ourselves dead to sin, and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Baptism means that what will happen to us after we die should happen in our lives now - no more sin!

How can this be, we ask? How can this really happen in my life? Is it possible?

Yes, it is possible, and meant to be. That is what Christian life, being baptized, and following Jesus is all about. It's a process of spiritual, personal healing and transformation we must all experience. The gospel gives us a beautiful description of what we must do. Have faith; follow Jesus through the cross, into the tomb, to rise to new life.

First of all, we must go up on the cross of our own sin, and enter, with faith, the tomb of our own darkness and sinfulness. St. Luke points out that the stone sealing the tomb was "rolled away." That stone was there to keep people out, not the dead person in. Satan does not want us to go into our own tomb, into a process of resurrection. He wants to keep us out, locked in our sin. But resurrection means that the stone was been rolled away and we can now freely enter with faith, see our sin for what it is, receive the forgiveness and healing of Jesus, and rise to a new life.

That is why the women went right into the tomb, saw where he lay, and also the burial cloth that bound him, the symbol of our sin and sinfulness that is meant to stay in the tomb. They were then reminded that how this amazing event happened was through the Passion and Death of Jesus. And that is how a new, transformed life will come to us - through living our own baptism, and following Jesus through that Paschal Mystery of Passion, Death, and Resurrection.

My brothers and sisters, Easter, Resurrection, baptism, means the same thing for us. We are called to conversion, to change through the power of the risen Lord. We are to enter into our tombs and leave our sins, our addictions, our lust, resentment, selfishness and darkness, there where they belong. And we are to rise, go out with Easter faith to find Jesus alive in the world and especially in the Church - in fellowship, in our families, our communities, in friendships, in our homes, schools, and offices and organizations.

Peter McKenna was severely wounded and blinded during the war in 1945. He fell in love with Mary Jane, the nurse who cared for him. They were married, had nine children, 18 grandchildren, and four great grandchildren. He has never seen his wife nor his family, except through the eyes of his soul and his relationship with them. He is a happy man, and would like to find the soldier who shot him, to thank him whom he has already forgiven, because Mary Jane was the best thing that happened to him in his life. That is Easter faith.

The Eucharist we celebrate tonight is a sharing in that living water, that new life of Easter. As we receive the Body and Blood of Jesus with faith, we are transformed into his Body and sent out to live the Paschal Mystery that alone will bring peace to our troubled world.

So, this night especially, have faith; follow Jesus through the cross, into the tomb, and rise to new life.