

EASTER VIGIL HOMILY - YEAR C
(Romans 6:3-11; Psalm 118; Luke 24:1-12)

A young man once asked his 97 year old grandfather, “Do we have less tendency to sin as we get older?” His grandfather answered, “Gee, son, you better ask someone who is older than me!” He then asked an older elder when we stopped sinning. This one answered, “About 15 minutes after we die!”

Actually, the last elder is both right, and wrong. It is true that we can no longer sin after we die. But faith in the resurrection of Jesus, and truly living our own baptism, means that we can really die to sin right now, and “walk in newness of life” for God in Christ Jesus. In short, living our baptism means rising to a new, sinless life in Christ right now!

This special night is a fourfold celebration of light, word, baptismal renewal and Eucharist. We have just feasted on the word of God and journeyed through a remembrance of how God has worked mighty wonders throughout our history to save us from the powers of darkness. Shortly, we will experience that power as we celebrate the sacraments of initiation, and the Eucharist.

Right now, let us deepen our understanding of what we are celebrating. Lent, Easter and resurrection are all one unity: they are all about a radical dying to sin’s old way of life, and rising to a new, transformed way of life that is a share of eternal life for us right here, right now!

Throughout the world this night, the Church is invited to listen to nine readings: seven from the Old Testament, plus the epistle and a gospel. Each reading is a progression of statements about covenants broken and renewed by God, culminating in the new covenant of the Son. For pastoral reasons the number from the Old Testament can be reduced to a minimum of three, but the Exodus account is never omitted.

The powerful Exodus account describes how the Hebrew people were liberated from political oppression in Egypt, a reminder of the movie the “Ten Commandments.” 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 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. Peter comes away from the empty tomb amazed at what happened, not yet understanding or daring to believe.

Let us deepen our own understanding of what happened that Easter night centuries ago, and its impact on us. There are some similarities 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, and his resurrection to new life*). Here the similarity ends. What is overcome by Jesus is not just political oppression, but the very power of sin and death 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 and defects of character! 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.

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, sin, 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 saw 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 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, and baptism mean 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, find Jesus alive in the world and in the Church - in fellowship, in our families, our communities, in friendships, in our homes, schools, band offices and organizations.

The New Interpreters Bible offers a succinct insight into how resurrection happens in our lives. While the Gospels all affirm that the tomb was empty, they all point beyond it to the post-resurrection appearances. For all the importance of the historical data, the Gospels ground our faith not on the stone and the linen cloths but on the presence of the risen Lord in

human experience. Typically, it is not the persuasive power of the empty tomb but a personal encounter with the risen Lord that leads to faith. It was that way for Peter and Thomas and the other disciples and for Paul, and it is still that way for us. Our search for the empty tomb must lead us to a healing and empowering personal experience of the Risen Lord in our lives.

An anonymous inspirational prose piece provided by Corbin Eddy captures the spirit of Easter for us this night. I entitled it "Our Deepest Fear."

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate;
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.
It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.
We ask ourselves, "Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous?"
Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God.
Your playing small does not serve the world.
There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that people don't feel insecure around you.
We were born to make manifest the glory of God within us.
It is not just in some of us, it is in everyone.
And, as we let our light shine, we unconsciously give each other permission to do the same.
As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence liberates others. (Anonymous)

We rejoice with those who will be baptized and/or confirmed tonight. They have prepared themselves well over the space of this past year for this special event. We pray for them and are privileged to be here to celebrate with them. We pray also for those who are still preparing to be baptized during the Easter season. May they grow in their understanding of these beautiful mysteries of salvation.

The Eucharist we celebrate tonight will be for us, more than ever, a joyous celebration of the love of God which has overcome death and gives us already a taste of the eternal life of the kingdom of God.

May our celebration tonight deepen our faith, hope and love, and help each one of us to experience resurrection in our lives each day.