

Easter Vigil – Homily by Fr. Dan Donovan (April 7, 2012)

For the original disciples, the **message of Easter** was as surprising as it was life-transforming. Jesus, it proclaimed, who two days earlier had been betrayed, abandoned, condemned, mocked and made to undergo the all but indescribable pain of crucifixion, has been raised by God to the fullness of life. “He lives,” the message announced, “he lives in God, he lives for us.”

The experience of the disciples on that first Easter was not unlike our experience at the beginning of tonight’s liturgy. Their despair, their darkness, was overcome by the shining presence of the risen Christ. He became and remains, the **light of the world**, a light that will never be extinguished, a light capable of bringing joy and hope to all who allow it to enter their lives.

As rapidly as the despair of the disciples gave way to hope and their sorrow to joy, it took time for them to take in and begin to understand all the implications of what had taken place. They did what we have done in the second part of tonight’s liturgy. They **looked to their Bible**, to what we call the Old Testament, in order to see how the death and resurrection of Jesus fitted in with and somehow brought to a climax God’s intentions in regard to the world and especially to human life.

The readings we have just heard come from almost every part of the Bible. We began as it begins with the **story of creation**. The God who raised Jesus from the dead is the creator God. Everything comes from and depends on him. Humans represent a privileged part of God’s creation. Made in his image and likeness, we are entrusted with the world and with our lives and the lives of one another. We are made to live our lives in the presence of God.

As much as the **story of Israel** is the story of a particular people, it offers a key to God’s intentions in regard to the whole of humanity. The story **begins with Abraham** with whom God made a covenant and to whom he promised that in him and his descendants all the families of the earth would be blessed.

With **Moses and the exodus**, the story becomes more focused. Having liberated the people from oppression, God commits himself to them as their God and invites them to be his people. Much of the

subsequent history of Israel will be **a learning** on their part of God's fidelity and generosity and of their need for him. The prophets will guide them and challenge them and, in times of darkness, open up for them the possibility of a new kind of future.

From the beginning, Christians read the Old Testament in the light of the death and resurrection of Jesus; they saw much of it pointing forward to him. He is the **new Adam**, the beginning of a renewed human race; he is the true son of Abraham, in whom all the nations of the world are blessed. His death and resurrection constitute a new exodus, a new form of liberation, not now from physical oppression but from sin and spiritual darkness. Through him God has sealed with humanity as a whole a new and eternal covenant. He invites us to be his people, to live in his presence, to walk in his ways. Through the gift of the Spirit, he enables us to share in the life of Jesus.

Tonight's reading from Paul's letter to the Romans suggests why the vigil service includes rituals and prayers related to the **theme of baptism**. The Greek root of the word **baptism** evokes an **immersing of something into liquid**, cloth into dye, a person into water. In the going down into water and the coming up out of it that were then a part of the baptismal ritual, Paul saw an image of our going down into the death of Christ so that we might rise up with him to newness of life.

Baptism is a symbolic, sacramental ritual by which we are first brought into contact with the saving power of the death and resurrection of Jesus. In it we encounter the risen Christ and find ourselves transformed by him.

In a few moments we will **renew our baptismal promises**. In doing so, let us open ourselves in faith to the risen Christ and to the gift of life that he continues to offer to us.