

April 8, 2023

9:00 P.M.

St. Augustine Cathedral

The Resurrection of the Lord at the Easter Vigil in the Holy Night of Easter

Tonight's Easter Vigil is not for the "faint of heart", but it IS the most important night of our Church Year, and it strengthens any weakness of faith or worries of our hearts that we might have because of what this Vigil celebrates. Jesus is alive, Alleluia. He is risen from the dead, Alleluia! He has robbed Death and Sin of their ultimate power, Alleluia! And we, who are part of His Body the Church, are given a share in that Victory, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

Several other Feasts have Vigils; every Sunday has a Vigil Mass on Saturday evening. But THIS Vigil is the most ancient of all which has its origins in Apostolic times; it is sometimes known as "the Mother of all Vigils", because we are celebrating the greatest and most unique event in human history. The Lord Jesus has risen from the dead, and our Salvation has been won, Alleluia!

This Easter Vigil has four parts to it. The First Part began with the lighting of the New Fire, and the lighting of the Easter Candle symbolizing Jesus' Resurrection. And as the Light of Christ seen in that Candle dispelled the darkness of our Cathedral, we also pray it dispels the darkness of our world, as well as any darkness in our hearts.

In the Second Part of our Vigil, the several beautiful Readings we heard proclaimed, recounted God's creating, saving and covenantal Love for us His people. When we hear those Readings with Faith, they are more than accounts of wondrous events that happened thousands of years ago, but they are a part of our living Faith tradition which helps us to know who we are as God's Holy People. God's Word is more than "**History**"; they tell "*His-Story*"; the story of God's unconditional Love and abiding Presence with us throughout the ages.

At this half-way point of our Easter Vigil, the Gloria has been gloriously sung; the Bells have been triumphantly rung; and the Alleluia's once again joyfully resound. All of that in preparation for tonight's Gospel, which is the best Good News the world could ever hear: Jesus is Alive! As we heard the Angel proclaim to the confused holy women: "*Do not be afraid! I know that you are seeking Jesus, the Crucified. He is not here; for He has been raised, just as He said.*" How could that be? What does it mean that He has been raised? So many questions, those holy women must have had. After seeing the empty tomb, and being instructed

by the Angel to go tell the Apostles this Good News, St. Matthew summed it up very well when he wrote: *“They went away quickly from the tomb, fearful yet overjoyed.* Who wouldn’t be? They had watched their Loving Lord die a painful, tragic death just two days earlier. They helped to prepare His lifeless Body and accompanied those who placed it in that very Tomb. They had now had two sleepless nights, waiting until the Sabbath was over so they could, as St. Matthew told us, *“come to see the tomb”*, just to be near His Body, as we do when we go to the cemetery to feel closer to our loved ones who have died.

The last thing they expected was to feel the earthquake, see an Angel in dazzling clothes sitting on the rolled away stone, and finding that Jesus was not there. What were they to think?! They were shocked, stunned, and petrified. Yet the Angel told them: *“Do not be afraid!”* The Angel gave them a mission---*“Go quickly and tell His disciples”*. But as they went, filled with the mixed emotions that this was just too good to be true, they encountered the Risen Lord Himself, Who also told them: *“Do not be afraid”*, and then He re-issued their mission to *“Go and tell My Brothers”* this Good News.

That’s the same mission we all have, my sisters and brothers in Christ. This Good News is not to be kept to ourselves. As Jesus’ disciples in these days, when we too might be both “fearful” of what’s going on in the world around us, and “joyful” because of the gift of our Faith, we too must “go and tell” this Good News to any, and all, who will listen.

The way that we do that is by being strong, courageous, and joyful witnesses to Jesus each and every day. We don’t have to go off to foreign lands, or far away places to do that. There are plenty of people we work with, who live in our neighborhoods, who go to the same schools, or are on the same teams----people we encounter every day who don’t have the Gift of Faith; who may not be interested in a life of Faith; who may actually be antagonistic toward those who do have Faith. But Jesus tells us today: Do not let the Light of your Faith be hidden under a bushel basket. Do not be afraid or embarrassed to express your Faith, make your big and small daily choices, in every aspect of your lives, motivated by our Faith.

In just a few moments, in the third part of this sacred Vigil, we will have the great honor of welcoming new members into our Family of Faith. Nathan Coffey will be baptized; and Kiersten Nielsen and William Willoughby will make a Profession of Faith; all 3 of them will receive the Sacrament of Confirmation and make their First Holy Communion, sharing the Eucharist with us for the first time.

And while we are truly happy for each of you, and we all promise to pray for Nathan as he begins his Life of Faith, and for Kiersten and William as they begin this new chapter of their ongoing Christian Faith Journeys now as Catholics, what happens to each of them is also an extremely important reminder for each of us, as we pause on this Easter night, at this point on our own Journeys of Faith in this world.

It's very important for ALL of us to remember, that our Faith is not just about believing certain dogmas and living our lives according to Catholic teachings; our Faith is about a life-long Encounter with the Risen Lord Jesus, and following Him as faithfully as we can throughout our lives. Our central focus is not on "believing something" but "believing in Jesus" through the teachings of the Church, and experiencing Jesus' Presence in the Sacraments of the Church.

That's why on this night, and throughout the Easter Season, there is such an emphasis on our Baptism into Christ, which Nathan will experience in just a few moments, when all his past sins will be washed away; the same Baptism that each of us experienced years, or maybe decades, ago. Our Baptism is what makes all the difference in our lives---an eternal difference. Shortly, we will all renew our Baptismal Promises, and be sprinkled with the Easter Water I will bless to remind us of what our Baptism calls us to do: to live our lives differently from those who have no Faith; to make choices that are motivated by much different factors than those with no faith; to pursue a life of holiness in this world because of our Faith, which will, we pray, help us to live lives of true happiness in this world, and will lead us to eternal Life in Heaven. Our Baptism is where it all begins; our Baptism into Christ is what gives meaning and direction to our lives.

Twice in this evening's Gospel---once by the Angel, and a second time by Jesus Himself, the holy women were told not just to "go and tell the disciples" that Jesus is Alive; but also to tell them to go to Galilee, where they will see Him. Keep in mind that they were in Jerusalem; so, for Jesus to tell them to go to Galilee---70 miles away and a several day walk---we might ask, Why? It might be because Galilee was where it all began for Jesus and the Apostles. They were all fishermen, farmers, tax collectors from Galilee. That's where they were first "called". And that's where Jesus wanted them to see Him Alive, and where He would send them out on their Mission to "go out to the whole world and baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." It was important to Jesus that they return to their beginnings.

That's also why it's important for us to remember our beginnings in the Faith--our Baptism, which first sent us on our life mission. And with each Easter we celebrate, we are asked to renew our Baptismal Promises and recommit ourselves to keep being strong in our Faith, and to do all that we can to help others to come to know Jesus, the Risen One, so that they too can receive the precious Gift of Faith. Our Baptism into Christ launched us on our Journey of Faith. But the Holy Eucharist, that we as Catholics are privileged to receive every time we come to Mass, is what strengthens and nourishes us on our Journey of Faith.

That is the 4th part of our Vigil Mass this evening. Jesus didn't just give us the Eucharist; He IS the Eucharist. Jesus IS the Gift of Himself to us; Jesus' Body and Blood in the Eucharist IS our Food for the Journey of Faith.

And we celebrate all of this in this beautiful Easter Vigil in the Holy Night of Easter. Easter is all about new Life and new beginnings. Easter is the supernatural celebration of what is taking place in our natural world all around us: Winter is over, Spring has begun, and signs of new life are budding all around us. Our beautiful world is coming back to life, and soon, it will be in full bloom.

That's what we experience here this evening; we will very soon witness Nathan experience new spiritual life thru his Baptism into Christ; Kiersten and William, along with Nathan, will be filled with the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in Confirmation; we will all renew our Baptismal Promises to believe in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and to live our lives as people of Faith in our day and time; and we will ALL receive Jesus Himself in the Holy Eucharist so that we can be spiritually nourished and keep living holy lives on our Journey of Faith.

It's the Hope and Promise of Easter that enables us to do this: Jesus has destroyed the paralyzing hold of sin and the ultimate power of death, Alleluia! Jesus has been raised to New Life, Alleluia! Jesus has given us a share in His Victory, Alleluia! Therefore, let us be much more joyful than we are fearful. Jesus Himself tells us: "*Do not be afraid*". Why? Because He is Alive, and we are called to live with Him, now and forever. Alleluia! Alleluia!