Easter Vigil

What a night/day my friends -- Jesus Christ is risen. Jesus Christ is risen and life will never be the same again!

Jesus: His friends, His family and indeed all of Jerusalem, thought dead was raised to life some one thousand nine hundred and ninety years ago.

That first Easter was incredible, it started with disbelief, with fear and trembling beside the empty tomb, and ended with astonishment, excitement, praise and thanksgiving.

Despite all the disciples had seen Jesus do, from healing the sick to calming the storms, and despite all the disciples and heard Jesus say about how He would be killed and on the third day be raised - not one of them expected – after the cross was raised, not one them hoped after He was laid in the grave to ever see Jesus again.

No one watched near the tomb. No one waited to see if He would rise.

No, when Jesus died their hopes died, their beliefs died – their faith died and they huddled in a room – hiding there – in fear that what happened to Jesus would happen to them.

No one expected the resurrection. Despite what they had seen. Despite what they had heard. Despite what they had experienced.

But, the resurrection *did* happen. It happened because God made it happen. And God not only made it happen, but He went on to raise the faith of those disciples - He brought to life again their dead beliefs and restored the hope they had lost. And that is why we are here tonight/today.

We are here tonight/today to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ for it is the most important thing that we believe in as Christians. It is the center of our faith, it is the foundation of our Christian experience, and it is the goal to which we aspire.

The resurrection is important to us, not *just because* those disciples finally came to believe in it – or not *just because* it is a nice ending to the story of Jesus. No, the resurrection is important to us because it is the beginning of *our* story.

For *we* are a people who have been called to believe in the power and the love that the resurrection shows. And we are promised – we are *promised* - that when we trust and believe - when we trust and believe in the power and the love of God - a power and love that can raise the dead to life - our lives will be changed - we too will be raised to new life.

Yes, we are promised – we are *promised* - that if we believe in the resurrection it will make a difference to us – it will make a difference to us - and indeed it does.

Let me tell you a story of little boy named Jeremy.

Jeremy was born with a twisted body, a low mind and chronic, terminal illness that had been slowly killing him for all his young life. Still his parents had tried to give him as normal a life as possible and had sent him St. Theresa's Parish School.

At the age of 12, Jeremy was only in second grade, seemingly unable to learn. His teacher, Doris Miller, often became exasperated with him.

Although there were times when he spoke clearly and distinctly, most of the time he would just squirm in his seat, drool and make grunting noises.

Though Miss Miller was sympathetic towards Jeremy - after all he had a terminal illness - she thought that it wasn't fair to keep him her class. She had 18 other youngsters to teach, and Jeremy was a distraction. Furthermore he would never learn to read and write. Why waste any more time trying?

As she pondered the situation, guilt washed over her. "Oh God, she said aloud, "here I am complaining when my problems are nothing compared with Jeremy's.

Please help me to be more patient with him." From that day on, she tried hard to ignore Jeremy's noises and his blank stares.

Well, Spring came as it does sooner or later every year and the children talked excitedly about the coming of Easter. Doris told them the story of Jesus and then to emphasize the idea of new life springing forth, she gave each of the children a plastic egg.

"Now she said to them, "I want you to take this home and bring it back tomorrow with something inside that shows new life. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Miss Miller!" the children responded enthusiastically - all except for Jeremy. He just listened intently, his eyes never left her face. He did not even make his usual noises.

Had he understood what she had said about Jesus' death and resurrection? Did he understand the assignment? Perhaps she should call his parents and explain the project to them.

That evening, Doris' kitchen sink stopped up. She called the plumber and waited hours for him to come by and unclog it. After that, she still had to shop for groceries and prepare a vocabulary test for the next day. She completely forgot about phoning Jeremy's parents.

The next morning nineteen children came to school, laughing and talking as they placed their eggs in the large wicker basket on Miss Miller's desk and after they had settled down a bit, it was time to open the eggs.

In the first egg, Doris found a flower. "Oh yes, a flower is certainly a sign of new life," she said. "When plants peek through the ground, we know that spring in here." A girl in the first row waved her arms and shouted. "That's my egg Miss Miller."

The next egg contained a plastic butterfly, which looked very real. Doris held it up. "We all know that a caterpillar changes and grows into a beautiful butterfly. Yes, that is new life too." Little Jack smiled proudly and said "Miss Miller, that one is mine!"

Next Doris found a rock with moss on it. She explained that moss, too, showed life. Sophia spoke up from the back of the classroom. "My daddy helped me!" She beamed.

Then Doris opened the fourth egg. She frowned. The egg was empty! Surely it must be Jeremy's she thought, and of course, he did not understand her instructions. If only she had not forgotten to phone his parents. Because she did not want to embarrass him, she quietly set the egg aside and reached for another.

Suddenly Jeremy spoke up loud and clear, "Miss Miller, aren't you going to talk about my egg?"

Flustered, Doris replied, "But Jeremy – your egg is empty!"

He looked into her eyes and said softly, "Yes, but Jesus' tomb was empty too!"

Time stopped. When she could speak again, Doris asked him. "Do you know why the tomb was empty?" "Oh, yes!" Jeremy exclaimed, "Jesus was killed and put in there. Then his Father raised him up!"

Just then, the recess bell rang. While the children excitedly ran out to the school grounds to play. Doris sat at her desk and cried.

Three months later, Jeremy's illness caught up with him and he died. All of his classmates attended the funeral and after the priest spoke, the children came forward and placed something in a basket on his casket.

The others who paid their respects that day were surprised to see nineteen plastic eggs - all of them empty.

Yes what we believe does make a difference to us.

After all was said and done, Jeremy had gotten it. Despite his twisted handicapped body, despite his slow mind and chronic terminal illness, he *believed* in the resurrection.

And after he died, his sprit was freed from the limitations of that little human body and he is alive and well for all eternity.

And because we also believe in the resurrection we know that Jesus is alive and well and with us always. He is not some memorable figure from the past, but a living vibrant person who continues His mission among us.

Because we believe in the resurrection we know that Jesus is who He says He is. He is the Son of God, the Savior of the world. He is the Christ - the Messiah. His is everything; the way, the truth, and the life.

Because we believe in the resurrection we know that good is more powerful than evil and that life is stronger than death and we are called to be a people who look for the oasis in the desert, for the silver lining in every cloud - for the smile behind every tear.

**Because we believe in the resurrection we know that as you – Joseph, Merced, and Sean are baptized or confirmed or receive your first Eucharist tonight, Jesus comes to you.

The one who has conquered death comes to you and meets you where you are. And through this personal encounter He will calm your trembling, quite your fears and open your hearts to proclaim His love to the world.

Because we believe in the resurrection we know that Jesus is true to His word. He said He would rise from the dead in three days, and He did.

That means we can also take Jesus at His word when He says that the bread of this Eucharist tonight/today really is His body, and the wine really is His blood.

Because we believe in the resurrection we all know that Jesus comes to us in His Word, in His Eucharist, in His Church to bring good out of evil, love out of hate, and hope out of despair. Jesus comes to bring back to life all who have died.

Yes, like little Jeremy - this is what we believe; We believe in the resurrection - we believe the tomb is now empty - and what we believe makes a difference to us.

What a night/day - Jesus Christ is risen. Jesus Christ is risen and life can never be the same again. Amen Alleluia!