

Fr Ryan Homily - Easter Vigil 4-8-23 & Easter 4-9-23

Read: (Vigil) Genesis 1:1-2:2; Psalm 104; Genesis 22:1-18; Psalm 16; Exodus 14:15-15:1; Exodus 15:1-6, 17-18; Isaiah 54:5-14; Psalm 30; Isaiah 55:1-11; Isaiah 12:2-6; Baruch 3:9-15, 32-4:4; Psalm 19; Ezekiel 36:16-28; Psalm 51; Romans 6:3-11; Psalm 118; Matthew 28:1-10; (Easter Day) Acts of the Apostles 10:34a, 37-43; Psalm 118; Colossians 3:1-4; John 20:1-9

A few years ago a group of a dozen boys with their soccer coach in Thailand decided to go exploring a cave. And they had done this many times before. They actually knew the caves pretty well. And they were just gonna be out there for a little while. One of the boys, a teenager, was celebrating his birthday so they were gonna go explore the caves, hang out, and then come back home for some cake. And so they arrived, dropped off their bikes, and went into one of their favorite places and while they were in the caves there was a flash flood. The rainy season came early that year, this was late June, and the flood happened so fast that it blocked the way that they went in. So they had no other choice but to keep going farther into the caves. And the water just kept rising and they had to keep running from it. Eventually they found themselves two and a half miles into the mountain where there was a shelf that they could kind of all fit on and they huddled together for warmth. They had no food because they didn't expect that they'd be in this cave for very long. They had a couple of flashlights, but the flashlights didn't last very long. Thankfully they could drink the water that was actually falling down the walls of the cave. It was clean enough they could drink it. But they just huddled together, and they had no other choice but to wait because the waters just kept rising around them. Outside the cave what was happening? Everybody of course was panicking wondering where their children were. And pretty quickly they figured out that the kids had gone into these caves. Pretty quickly they started to get rescue teams together. The Thai Navy SEALs started going into the caves and because you can't just walk you have to swim they needed the Navy SEALs, you had to do some diving. So through certain parts of the cave it was all pitch black. After a couple of days the Thai Navy SEALs were really struggling. They had no way to make their way through these caves. It was just miles and miles of a cave system. And so then expert divers from other countries started coming over from the US, the UK, Australia. They're joining in the efforts trying to do everything they can to get these kids out. After 10 days finally one British diver

comes up into the part of the cave he knew would have some air. And he comes up to the top of the water, turns on his flashlight, and there they all were. Twelve boys and their soccer coach. All alive, amazingly. Very weak but alive and starting to lose oxygen, no light in the small space, breathing the same air. Now at this point they had to figure out a way to get these boys out. Expert divers were struggling to get their way into this place - well how are they gonna get the kids out? And so they did manage to come up with a system of putting a full oxygen helmet on every person, somewhat sedated them, and basically connected them to a halo so that they could put them underwater and maneuver them through these caves. But it took them four more days to get all of these boys out. The last one emerged on day 14. And to me that's a story that's both sad and inspiring. It's sad thinking about what it must have been like for these boys in that cave and inspiring to see what the human spirit can do. To see the intense efforts the rescuers made to get there and to find a way to get them out of that cave. And tonight I was struck, as I always am during the Easter Vigil, that we experience a dark church at first. Thinking about the relation to that cave. That cave; I can't imagine what it must have been like for those kids being in there for two weeks without any light. Their flashlights died early on, they had no light, and they were longing for their families, they were hungry, they were longing for any comfort, any amount of light. And I can't imagine the joy of seeing that flashlight turn on when that diver finally came up out of the water. I think in a way when the church gives us a dark church for the Easter Vigil and processes in with one candle at first, it's a reminder for us that we live in darkness. And Jesus has come to bring His light into our darkness. And I think in a way that whole story is an analogy for sin and for what God has done for us in Jesus. When those boys went into the cave they thought they were just gonna have fun for a while. And sometimes we think the same thing with sin. We think we're only gonna stay there for a little while. We think it'll be fun or pleasurable or comfortable. We choose the easy thing or whatever it is when in the moments we don't think it's a big deal. We don't think we're choosing something terrible. Something that will end in death. And yet the reality of sin is that it sucks us deeper and deeper into that darkness. And then we reach a point where there is nothing we can do to get us out of our sin. We're trapped in it. And no amount of good deeds can forgive us our sins, no amount of prayer is gonna earn us eternal life. We need a rescuer. Someone who is willing to dive down into that darkness, into that pain and the difficulty, to find us where we

are and to draw us out. And that's what we celebrate at Easter. We have a God who became man and that man died on a cross on Good Friday and He rose from the dead just like He said He would. And we can have hope in Him knowing that He has come back to rescue us from our sins. Come to rescue us from our pain, our suffering, and our death. Our pain, our suffering, the violence in this world, the illness of this world. And then our death is not the end of the story. That's what Easter is about. Life is the end of the story cause Jesus has conquered death. Now in the gospels we kinda glaze over what the women's initial reaction must have been going to that tomb. The women come to the tomb in the morning expecting to find normal circumstances that you normally find at a tomb. They're just there to pray. Imagine showing up, the stone is rolled away, and the tomb is empty. If I were to go to a cemetery to see my loved one and I saw that there was a hole in the ground and the casket was open and there's nobody in that casket, I'd freak out probably. And my gut reaction would be one of anger because it would be obvious someone has stolen this body. There's no other explanation than that. That was probably their gut reaction, someone has stolen the Lord. And so they go back, and they tell the other apostles and in John's gospel Peter runs back and John runs back. Because Peter and John have to see this for themselves. And Peter is probably experiencing that same anger. He can't believe that someone would do this, but he peers into the tomb, and he sees that it's empty except for the burial cloths. And that's how he knows Jesus' body was not stolen. Now I've never stolen a body however if I were to do it, I would not strip it naked first. And that's how he knew that the body was not stolen because it had been stripped naked, and the clothes were still there. And then all of the gospels go on to tell us that Jesus appeared multiple times to the apostles, to Peter himself. And Peter and Jesus have this beautiful encounter at the end of John's gospel where they get to reconcile after Peter's three denials. He gets to tell Him three times yes Lord you know that I love you. And Peter before the end of his life, he gave the church several letters, we put them into the New Testament. His first letter, the First Letter of Peter Chapter 3, St. Peter says we should always be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in us. You should always be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in us. That coming from the guy who pretended not to know Jesus the night before the crucifixion. That was a man without any hope. But by the end of his life you could tell he knew we need to be ready to give a reason for our hope. Because Peter knows Jesus rose from the dead because he encountered the

risen Lord in the flesh. He wasn't encountering Jesus as a ghost, Jesus as a spirit. After the empty tomb, Peter has seen Jesus. He's touched Him. He's seen Jesus eat food. Listened to His words with His ears. Jesus continually appeared to His apostles in His resurrected body. And so now Peter has hope. He's filled with hope because he's encountered Jesus risen from the dead and today the church invites us to place our hope in the exact same Jesus. The risen Christ. Who else are we gonna put our hope in? Without Jesus we find ourselves in that cave in the darkness the cave of our sins, the cave of our despair. Cause we know this world can lead us into that cave and leave us there, but it cannot bring us back out. We need someone to come in and get us and Jesus has done that. And yet how many of us, how many times have probably all of us not accepted the Lord's rescue? It would have been bizarre for those boys trapped in the cave after 10 days finally that diver pops up and says I'm here to rescue you and bring you home and one of the boys says no I'm not interested. I think I'll stay here. Like we can't imagine that happening and yet we do it all the time. The Lord comes to rescue us from our sins. He offers us new life. All we have to do is follow Him. And we say no I kinda like it the way it is. That's sad that we choose to live in darkness. For anyone who's ever maybe been going through an addiction or anyone who's been in the dark depths of their own sin, and you've experienced Jesus pulling you out of that, you have a beautiful testimony. Be willing to share that testimony with people who have no hope because many here I'm sure could share that story. But maybe you're here and you're thinking I've never had that experience. You feel like Jesus has never come to rescue you and I would say it probably begins then with recognizing you are in a dark place. That dark place of sin that we can't forgive by ourselves. And there's likely a loneliness in your life that comes along with that cause sin ultimately separates us from God. It will separate us from others. It breaks our own heart. It damages our own heart. So we have to come to the acknowledgement that we are in the darkness before we ever will be willing to say yes to the one who comes to rescue us with the light. And yeah He's gonna ask you to follow Him unreservedly and that is a difficult invitation, but it is so worth it. Just listen to the saints who have gone before us. And so tonight the church invites us to truly recognize Jesus has risen from the dead and He has come to be our rescuer. Let Jesus be the reason for the hope that is in you.

Amen