

Easter Vigil - April 15, 2017
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I think it's fair to say that we've heard a decent amount of Scripture tonight! At times it might have seemed a bit boring... wondering is this *ever* going to end??... We're waiting... maybe thinking to ourselves, "Come on, get to the good part! Get to Jesus rising from the dead!" If you thought that at any point during the past 45 minutes or so: *Good!* That's part of why we do this, why we have such a solemn vigil with so many readings from the history of salvation: because we as a people have waited for so long for the fulfillment of God's plan. And on Easter night, that plan is fulfilled!

So tonight we heard snippets of how God's plan was enacted over many centuries. We heard the story of creation, how God created the universe, the earth, everything in it over a period of time (as science tells us, over billions of years! Hopefully the readings tonight didn't seem quite *that* long!). We heard how harmonious creation was, how God intended it to be. Yet throughout lent we've remembered the sad story that humanity sinned and rejected God. So God acted to rescue us from ourselves.

God chose a special people, born from Abraham, and he worked out his plan, and he foreshadowed it with Abraham. Where Abraham was *not* required to give up his son, his only son Isaac, who carried the wood for the sacrifice, God the Father *did* give up his Son, his only Son, who carried the wood for his sacrifice, to set us free.

We heard about how God saved his chosen people from slavery in Egypt, after centuries of waiting, having them pass through the waters of the Red Sea. So God saves us from the slavery of sin, bringing us through the waters of baptism. And tonight — and this is a special joy — 7 people in our midst will pass through those same waters, with two more Christians being admitted to full communion with the Catholic Church. To all of you, a huge welcome! Our prayers go with you. And thanks be to God! His plan's at work, right here!

We also heard readings from several prophets. Through the prophets, God spoke powerful words of change and comfort and promise and hope. These words were often written at times of great difficulty for the people — as we are often going through difficult times ourselves, as we often pray in the Salve Regina, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. So try to imagine how these words would have sounded to a people who were waiting and suffering. And take the words of promise from the prophets for yourself:

"I am about to set your stones in antimony, and lay your foundations with sapphires. ... In righteousness you shall be established; you shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear."

"Incline your ear, and come to me; listen so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant."

"I am about to act... A new heart I will give you and a new spirit I will put within you ... and you shall be my people, and I will be your God."

And then again in the gospel: the two Marys saw Jesus dead. He had been dead for a couple of days already, and now it was the third day. What must have been going through their minds as they walked to the tomb? They thought Jesus was *it!* They had placed their hopes in him, but now he was dead.

Thankfully, their waiting, and the world's waiting was at an end!

What we proclaim this evening is what St. Paul proclaims to us; it's what strikes us to the core of our being. It's what the empty tomb shouts out in deafening silence:

Jesus Christ is risen from the dead! Alleluia!

As the late, great Paul Harvey would say, now we know the rest of the story. God's plan is fulfilled.

And this fulfillment is not some abstract thing, something up there, in the clouds! I was really struck by this gospel of Matthew, with the raw physicality of the resurrection, and how real and tangible it is. The two Marys *feel* the earthquake and *see* the angel, who looks "like lightning." Then they *see* Jesus with their eyes and they *hear* his voice with their ears and they reach out and *touch* his feet. Jesus tells them that he'll meet the disciples in a real place, Galilee, and they'll *see* him there. And of course once he's with them there, he's eating and talking. It's real. The disciples experienced it. And they couldn't help but tell the world, and so we're here today.

The resurrection changed everything for his disciples. Most of them gave up their own lives because of what they had *seen* and what they had *heard* and what their hands had *touched*.

The resurrection changes everything for us. God's plan is real, not just for those few people back then, but here and now. We are part of God's plan. The God of life is with us here, tonight. He's inviting us all in, closer to himself.

Our lives have hope because Jesus lives. We are now living in a world where sin and death don't have the final say. Death loses; life wins! Christ is risen. He is risen indeed!

That was worth the wait! May we follow him to life.