



The Holy See

EASTER VIGIL

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II

Holy Saturday, 19 April 2003

1. "Do not be afraid; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen, he is not here" (*Mk 16,6*).

At sunrise of the first day after the Sabbath, as recounted in the Gospel, some women go to the sepulchre to honour the body of Jesus, who, having been crucified on Friday, was quickly wrapped in linen and placed in the tomb. They look for him, but they do not find him: *he is no longer in the place where he was laid. All that remains of him are the signs of the burial*: the empty tomb, the bindings, the linen shroud. The women, however, are disturbed by the sight of "a young man, dressed in a white robe", who proclaims to them: "He is risen, he is not here".

This upsetting news, destined to change the course of history, from that moment on continues to resound from generation to generation: an ancient proclamation, yet always new. It resonates once again during this Easter Vigil, mother of all vigils, and it is spreading at this very moment throughout all the earth.

2. *O sublime mystery of this Holy Night!* The night in which we relive *the extraordinary event of the Resurrection*. If Christ were to have remained a prisoner of the tomb, humanity and all of creation, in a certain way, would have lost their meaning. But you, Christ, are truly risen.

The Scriptures we have just heard in the Liturgy of the Word *find their fulfilment* and run through every stage of the entire salvific plan. At the beginning of Creation, "God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (*Gn 1:31*). To Abraham he had promised: "by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves" (*Gn 22:18*). Here is again proposed one of the most ancient themes of the Hebrew tradition which reveals the meaning of the Exodus when "the Lord saved Israel from the hand of the Egyptians" (*Ex 14:30*). The promises of the Prophets continue to be fulfilled in our time: "I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes..." (*Ez 36:27*).

3. On this night of *Resurrection* everything begins anew; *creation* regains its authentic meaning in the plan of salvation. It

is like a *new beginning* of history and of the cosmos, because Christ is risen, "the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor 15:20). Christ, the "last Adam", has become "a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor 15:45).

The same sin of our forefathers is sung in the Easter Proclamation as "*felix culpa*", "O happy fault, which gained for us so great a Redeemer!". Where sin abounded, grace now abounds all the more, and "the stone which the builder rejected has become the corner stone" (Psalm Response) of an indestructible spiritual edifice.

On this Holy Night a new people is born with whom *God has sealed an eternal covenant* in the blood of the Word made flesh, crucified and risen.

4. One becomes a member of the people of the redeemed through Baptism. As the Apostle Paul has reminded us in Epistle to the Romans: " We are buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (6:4). This exhortation is especially for you, dearest *catechumens*, to whom, in just a few moments, Mother Church will administer the great gift of divine life. From different countries divine providence has led you here, to the tomb of Saint Peter, to receive the Sacraments of *Christian Initiation*: Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist. Entering in this way into the house of the Lord, you will be consecrated with the oil of happiness and can feed yourselves with the Bread of Heaven.

Sustained by the power of the Holy Spirit, *you will persevere in your faith in Christ*, and courageously proclaim his Gospel.

5. Dearest Brothers and Sisters gathered here! In just a few moments we too will be united with the catechumens in renewing our Baptismal promises. We will again renounce Satan and all his works clinging firmly to God and his work of salvation. In this manner, we will make *an even firmer commitment to an evangelical life*.

Mary, joyful witness of the Resurrection, help us all to live "*a new life*"; make each of us conscious that, having crucified our "old self" with Christ, we must consider and conduct ourselves as new men, people "alive to God, in Christ Jesus" (cf. *Rm 6:4,11*).

Amen, Alleluia!

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