

Easter Vigil Homily
Given by Fr. John Koziol, OFM Conv.
April 4, 2015

Forty-five days ago, we began a long, and for some, an arduous journey. Our journey began on Ash Wednesday with the simple, yet profound act, of marking our foreheads with dirty, black ash in the form of a cross. That simple act signified our willingness to undergo a period of conversion and transformation so that, by journey's end, we might be prepared to celebrate more worthily the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ; that is, His dying and rising.

And so here we are at the Easter Vigil. Some of us may feel quite ready to celebrate this holy night. Some of us may have a tinge of regret that our Lenten resolutions were not kept as faithfully as we had hoped. Whatever be the case, we are here, a blessed people, a privileged people, a people God has chosen to be His own. And we are here to recall the greatest of all mysteries – the dying and rising of our Lord. “Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ will come again.”

The word “Lent” derives from an old Anglo-Saxon word which means “to lengthen”. It was used to speak of the lengthening days of spring. As days lengthen and as the sun warms the earth after a long winter, new life appears, flowers bloom and trees blossom, birds return from their winter vacations, singing beautiful birdsongs. Life returns, to what appeared during the long months of winter, to be dead.

The new life of springtime speaks eloquently of the holy mysteries we celebrate this night. Through the dying and rising of Jesus Christ, humanity has been reborn. New life has sprung forth. Death has been conquered forever. What was lost on account of sin is renewed by the transforming power of God's grace.

Throughout the world, this night, mother Church gives birth to new Christians through the waters of Baptism. The Elect are called forth and immersed in the waters of new life. They emerge from the font, transformed into a new creation, rejuvenated by God's love; they are anointed into the three-fold ministry of Jesus – Priest, Prophet and King. They receive a new dignity – the dignity of the sons and daughters of God.

And although tonight we have no Elect to be baptized, we are no less fortunate, for tonight the living waters of Baptism belong also to all of us. As we once again renounce sin and profess our baptismal faith and are sprinkled with these life-giving waters, we are renewed, rejuvenated and transformed by the ritual we celebrate. Just as God smiled on the world He created at the very beginning and declared it good, so God smiles upon us tonight and declares us very good. We belong to God. We are His sons and daughters. Like the Israelites who, through God's grace, escaped bondage in Egypt and were led through the Red Sea to new life and liberation, so we too, through the waters of our Baptisms, have been given precious new life and are freed from sin which enslaved us.

Tonight, we celebrate new life – a new springtime.

Tonight, we claim the words of St. Paul that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus have received newness of life.

Tonight, we will celebrate Confirmation and Eucharist with those who have faithfully prepared for these sacraments over many months. We rejoice with them as they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and, for the first time, join us at the table of the Eucharist.

As we reflect upon the scene in today's Easter Gospel, let us place ourselves at the empty tomb with Mary Magdalen, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome. Let us hear anew the words of the angel:

“Do not be amazed! You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Behold the place where they laid him.”

Indeed Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead and He is alive. But how can we not be amazed? How can we not be amazed by the transforming, life-giving power of God? God who raised Jesus from the dead has also raised *us* from the dead, in Him and through Him.

This is the night to be amazed. This is the night to be filled with joy and rejoice that Jesus Christ has risen, alleluia, alleluia! It is also the night for recommitment. We recommit ourselves to the life of discipleship. We recommit ourselves to live out, each and every day, the new life that has been given us. We are to be the presence of the risen Lord in our world. We are called to breathe new life into this world of ours. We are called to usher in a new springtime of God's grace everywhere we go. Easter joy must be followed by Easter living. We are an Easter people and we must live up to our call by being Christ for all we meet. In this way, the resurrection continues to amaze, enliven and bless the world.