

2021 Easter Vigil

1. **Do you know the great object of the whole of our vigil service tonight**, the goal to which everything converges? Our baptism! *More* glorious than the Easter vigil candle, which makes its passage through the darkness of the night, into the brightness of the Church, is the pull that the Risen Christ exerts within us, through the darkness of this life into the glories of eternal Life. *More* brilliant than the candle flame that each of us carries, which illumines the night around us, is **the flame of faith in our hearts that penetrates even the darkness of death.**

2. The *Exultet* captures the **cosmic greatness** of our celebration:

- Rejoice, O heavenly powers! Sing choirs of angels!
- Rejoice, O earth in shining splendor!
- Rejoice, O mother Church! Exult in glory!
- And we respond: "It is truly right that with full hearts and minds and voices we should praise the unseen God."

3. **Something very great is happening.** We are not celebrating a past event, though it happened in the past. The resurrection is in the present because the life of the Risen Christ forms the bookends of time, of our earthly calendar. That was the purpose of inscribing the year into the candle. **Time is enclosed within him, the Alpha and the Omega of time.** Our vigil is happening *out* of time, because time is now in him, but *in* time because time is not yet dissolved. We also pierced the candle with five grains of incense embedded in wax, showing how Jesus' wounds in death are joined to his indestructible resurrected life. Just as the power of the Paschal Mystery is alive and active in every moment of created time, so also **the power of our baptism is alive and pulsing every moment within us.**

4. How can we better enter into our mysterious new life in Christ?

St. Mark's remarkably brief Gospel with his precise description invites us to step into that first experience of the resurrection. For us too, a full day has passed in silence. The women who had the courage to be present at the Crucifixion are now hurrying to the tomb to finish the embalming. Mark assumes that the burial preparations were not completed. It's an early spring morning and the air is fresh and cool. The morning light is just appearing on the horizon. It is the first day of the week and God says again, **"Let there be light!" Something very great is happening!** But death (night) is still the unspoken norm of subconscious expectation! The women are still thinking like us on a worldly plane. We are powerless before the heavy stone of death: "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" **Aren't we all going to die? The grip of the new life has not yet taken hold.**

4. **We know why they expected the tomb to be still sealed.** But *when* they arrive full of readiness to touch a lifeless cold body, they are taken aback because the tomb is open and the stone rolled back. **The grip of the new life has not yet taken hold.**

5. **Allow me to tell you a few short anecdotes about a doctor Dr. Ernesto Cofiño** who died in 1991 and who was gripped by this new life. At 92 years, his cancer of the jaw returned. When he was told that an operation risked removing much of his skull with the consequent loss of his left eye, he said calmly, "It's not important, I can get by with one eye." Still eager to serve the Lord at 92, he used to give talks on formation, but his cancer made him drool a lot. Once, he noticed he was drooling and, turning to the person next to him, he quipped, "These classes are so fascinating they make me drool." **His sickness never saddened him.** When he was permanently hospitalized, he underwent radiation which made him confused and sleepy. He could wake up at any hour and say to his

nurse, “Are you ready?” “Ready for what, Doctor?” “What else? It’s time for Mass!” “Very well, Doctor,” his nurse would reply and wheel him about until he fell asleep. But then after a few hours he would cry out, “Mass! Mass!” If it wasn’t the Mass it was the Rosary! **The grip of the new Easter life had taken hold of him!**¹

6. **Back to the women.** They couldn’t see anyone in the tomb until they entered. A young man was seated on the right. They were alarmed, but the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid!” Previously, a young man had run away naked when Jesus was arrested in the garden, perhaps symbolizing the shame of the disciples. Now, there is a young man here clothed in white, symbolizing the intervention of God.² **They are amazed at his presence.** He announces to them unheard-of news: “Jesus of Nazareth has been raised, he is not here, come and check things out yourselves!” This time they are seized with amazement and trembling! **Something very great had happened!** We are face to face with the power of Christ’s resurrection!

7. **We have not yet experienced our physical resurrection** but we do experience a spiritual one like that which gripped Dr. Cofiño in his dying body and dissolved his fear of death. This spiritual resurrection makes possible a new way of life, because God’s Spirit now dwells in us. The Eucharist translates the resurrected life into time, our time, our life. Accept the Gospel anew each day in your Galilee. Christ’s humanity entered definitively into a glorified existence, ours enters through the passage of time. Take your daily run to the empty tomb in everything and **something great will happen!** The Risen Christ, with the power of his new life, love and freedom will embrace you! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

¹ Thomas McDonough, *No Small Goals: The Life of Ernesto Cofiño* (New Rochelle, NY: Scepter, 2019), 227.

² Mary Healy, *The Gospel of Mark*, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 329.