

Easter Vigil

I know that those readings are long, and that we have a long way to go tonight, but one of the symbols of the Easter Vigil is its length. When something important is happening, you lose track of time. You spend three hours at a ball game, three hours at the movies, and three hours at the shopping mall; you can spend three hours at church for the most important night of the year, the night that Jesus rose from the dead. I still have people ask me in all sincerity, does the Easter Vigil count for Sunday mass? I want to ask them, if you skip the Easter Vigil and go only to Easter Sunday mass, does that count? Of course, it does, but your presence here tonight indicates your eagerness to celebrate the resurrection of Christ in the hour at which the scriptures tell us that it took place. Only at this mass do we proclaim Christ risen in so many ways: the paschal candle, the Gloria, the Alleluia, the gospel of the resurrection, the sacraments of initiation, and most importantly in the first eucharist of Easter. When we share communion, we receive the risen Christ here with us today under the forms of bread and wine.

Of the nine readings we have just heard, numbers four and five, both from Isaiah, are exceptionally beautiful prophecies. In the first, we learn that after God established a covenant with Israel, Israel foolishly started following other gods. God compares his disappointing experience with Israel to the way a man marries a beautiful young woman who then finds someone else she wants to love. After a while, she realizes her mistake, and she wants to go back. Some men would never take back a woman like that. But God says he is not like such a husband. In the days of Noah, when people turned away from the covenant, God punished the earth with a flood. But then God promised never to do it again. God is faithful. He knows how we have sinned, but when we want to come back, he shows us mercy and love. For six weeks we have done penance for our sins, and God has taken notice. Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, God is taking us back.

In the second passage from Isaiah, we hear the invitation to come and drink even if we have no money. When it rains, water is free. God is a fountain of water ready to slake our thirst for him. Isaiah tells us, "Seek the Lord while he may be found, call him while he is near." You can find God anywhere. All you have to do is seek him. God is not remote, like a cloud floating on high. No, God is like water from that cloud that falls gently upon the earth, giving plants and animals something to drink. Like rain, God's word comes to the earth with a purpose. Our catechumens have been thirsting for God a long time, and tonight they come to the waters of baptism. Here they will experience that God generously gives them more than they could ever imagine. We know how to be generous, but we are never as generous as God. "My thoughts are not your thoughts," says the Lord, "nor are your ways my ways."

My brothers and sisters, this Easter night, we have heard many readings of God's word. They proclaim that God sends us what we need. Throughout this Lent, we admitted the promises we have broken. But tonight, this Easter night, God proves that the covenant of love lasts for ever. On this night, out of love for us, God gives us all we need: Jesus Christ risen from the dead.

SATURDAY, APRIL 15, 2017