

Easter Vigil, C – April 15, 2017 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Alabama – 8:00pm Mass – 675 words

On this most blessed night, Holy Mother Church pulls out all the stops in order to immerse us in the mystery of our Lord's Resurrection. At the beginning of Holy Mass there was darkness, a reminder of Christ's death, when darkness enveloped the land, and of the tomb; also a reminder of the darkness of sin, which he overcomes through his death and resurrection. Then the Easter candle appeared with the solemn chant, "The light of Christ", to which we rightly responded, "Thanks be to God". Light gradually filled the church, and then incense rose to heaven, our fragrant and joyful offering in gratitude to God. Then there was the solemn chanting of the ancient hymn, the Exsultet, recounting in a most beautiful way the joy and the glory of this most sacred night.

As if all these wonderful things weren't enough, we then heard several readings, so that we could recall the history of the Lord's care for his people, leading up to the death and resurrection of our Savior. We also sang the Gloria to the ringing of bells – sounds of rejoicing that have largely been silent over the past several weeks of Lent. Finally, in a few moments, before we move on to the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, in which we will have a living encounter with the Risen Lord, our Bishop will bless the baptismal water and celebrate the sacraments of initiation for several individuals who have been preparing over these last months. Baptism, the gateway to our life with Christ, makes us worthy of gathering at the altar and so gives us a pledge of sharing in Christ's risen life. Confirmation fills us with the strength of Christ's Spirit so that we can share his light with others. These men and women here have responded to God's grace working in different ways in their lives, and we are happy to welcome them into the company of the Church on this holy night.

To them, our converts here present, as well as those Catholics in our number who are also being confirmed tonight and so completing their Christian initiation, I would like to address a special word: this scene that I have narrated has taken place in your souls as well. Once you were in darkness, but Christ has entered in with his marvelous light. He has called each one of you personally, by name. He shares the fruit of his sacrifice with you also. Let the grace of this night live on in your hearts and in your lives. Yes, life will return to relative normal soon enough, but it can never be quite the same, for now you are receiving a special gift from the Lord – an infusion of grace and a pledge of future glory. Cherish it always, and walk always as children of the light.

All of the sacred sights, symbols, and sounds of this feast cause devotion to well up in our hearts. They are a fitting introduction to our prolonged celebration of the Resurrection of the Lord, which will continue for the next several weeks leading up to the Feast of Pentecost. During the Masses of these coming weeks we will meditate on the scripture passages that recount the events surrounding the Resurrection. And the prayers of each Mass will help us to understand how we participate in these mysteries in our own lives.

Many of our non-Catholic friends had already begun celebrating Easter while we Catholics were just beginning Holy Week. And soon the Easter decorations, the wonderful candy, and all the other signs of the season will disappear from so many homes and from all the stores. But we Catholics are just beginning. Our celebration has only begun. Our Lord Jesus Christ has risen from the dead – one day is not enough to honor so great an event! Now we enter in, and we do so with a bang. After the fast, we feast.

On behalf of Bishop Baker, it is my privilege to wish a very blessed Easter to you all!