

Easter Vigil in the Holy Night – March 31, 2018 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.  
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Alabama – 8:00pm – 875 words

On this holy night we celebrate the triumph of light over darkness, of life over death; indeed, we rejoice in the victory of Christ the Lord over the power of sin and evil. Everything about tonight's Holy Mass communicates these ideas to us: from the blessing of the new fire and the Easter candle outside, to the procession and the proclamation of Christ's praises; from the readings spanning all of salvation history, to the sacraments of initiation and the renewal of baptismal vows for those who are already part of the Church. And then, later, we will all be united around the altar, to worship and adore, and indeed, to receive the one who is not dead but is alive for evermore.

We have the great joy this evening of welcoming almost 20 seekers into the full unity of Christ's Church. In just a few moments they will take that final step, with some being baptized by our bishop, others making the profession of faith, and all receiving the sacrament of confirmation. There are some adult Catholics here this evening who were never confirmed, who will also complete their sacramental initiation. Bishop Baker, I assure you that we can be proud of the journey that all of these fine people have made, which culminates tonight: they have responded to the promptings of the Spirit; they have sought answers to their questions; they have prayed and been educated in the ways of the Catholic faith. Each one has a different story, a different path; but the one Lord who alone can bring us all together has spoken to each of their hearts and guided them to this point. With gratitude to God, I welcome each of you here tonight.

Each one of you is here to receive something special from God: new life in Christ through baptism, full membership in his Church, a permanent strengthening in his Spirit, the food for the journey that is Holy Communion. But I invite each one of you to reflect on what you have to give also. God's Church is so wonderfully diverse, like a large tapestry of different colors and textures that depicts a rich scene. By your enthusiastic and generous living out of your Catholic faith, you will enrich God's kingdom on earth; you will make the Church stronger and better. The place that you take among the ranks of the faithful tonight is one that has been prepared especially for you by the Lord, and all of us will be better off for your having arrived to claim your place. Remember the question that King David asked in one of his psalms: "What shall I give to the Lord, for all that he has given to me?"<sup>1</sup> David gave a priestly answer, but each person must answer in his own way, according to what God has given him.

Tonight is a high point, perhaps the highest, on your journey. But the Easter glow will subside; there will be moments when the difficulties of this life seem to prevail. Christ has risen and is alive for evermore; we, however, are still on the way of the cross and there are more Good Fridays ahead. I say this not to dampen the joy of this night, but to inject a bit of realism into it. Let us all ask the Lord for the grace of perseverance. These times of intense joy, these high points, are meant to remind us of the goal for which we strive and teach us that it is indeed worth striving for; when we are at lower points and struggling, we must call to mind the goal and renew our resolve to keep trudging along. This is why St. Paul said in the epistle, "you too must think of yourselves as being dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus" – we must be continually reminded of our identity in Christ so as not to return to former ways. And our perseverance – made possible only with the help of God's grace – will be rewarded in a most wonderful way.

The holy women in the gospel – the two Mary's and Salome – were "utterly amazed" when they found the tomb empty. They could not believe their eyes. They had heard Christ's preaching about his death and resurrection, but it must have seemed impossible – or at least too good to be true; thus they were not expecting to find that it really did happen. But that is what

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 116:12.

they saw. The fulfillment of God's promises in each one of us will far exceed anything that we could ever dare to imagine! As we all share, then, in the joy of our new Catholics and our fully-initiated Catholics this night, let us reflect with gratitude on all that the Lord has done for us. What shall we offer him in return? A humble spirit; a grateful heart; a commitment to be more generous in sharing his blessings; renewed resolve to persevere on the way... however we respond, let us not fail to give our answer to God – and ask for the grace to live it out.

My brother and sisters: the Lord is risen and has gone before us! Praised be Jesus Christ! Now and for ever. Amen.