

LENT NEWSLETTER

THE HIGH POINT OF LENT



THE EASTER VIGIL : THIS IS WHERE OUR FAITH IS REALLY AT!

How do you approach the Easter Vigil? It is the longest and most demanding of all the liturgies of the Church. It is also the one that would receive the best participation and involvement.

I must come to the Easter Vigil as if I was to be baptized into Jesus Christ tonight. This is the night when I will be joined to the mission, the person and the love of Jesus Christ.

Life will be different once I am baptized.

No one can ever “get” baptized. You live into and grow into your baptism. You are transformed more and more into the likeness of Christ.

As you look forward in six days to the great Vigil, get in touch with your own baptism. Sense what it means to be joined to the life and mission of Jesus Christ.

HOW TO USE THIS BULLETIN

“I was at a musical recital lately. I looked over the expressions of the people who were listening to the grade six and seven students playing the assigned piece of music. Each of the listeners were trying to get out of this musical experience what they could!

“The grandpa just sat there and smiled. Probably he missed most of the music because his hearing aid is so limited. He just enjoyed seeing his grandson play the piano. The mother listened so intently. There was no smile on her face. She was all concentration. The five year old sister just sat there waiting for this recital to be over.” It was the same event but each person was trying to take from it what they could.

The Easter Vigil is such an event. It is so loaded with history, faith, struggle and hope. No one person can get it all. No one person can absorb all there is to offer on this holy night.

This year try to absorb what you can take in. Only bite off the pieces that you can chew!

Darkness and the light clash

The Easter Vigil begins in the night. The ideal would be to be in a location where it is pitch dark. The darkness is deeply rooted in Scripture. Darkness always stands for death, evil and sin. Darkness is always opposed to God and God's goodness.

Ordinary people express this reality by saying, "I had to get out of that house because it was so dark in there!" The electricity was working very well but the atmosphere was filled with selfishness and evil. The darkness in such a house was tangible!

The darkness makes a very powerful statement for the Christian believer. In our more honest moments we will recognize the darkness within our own hearts. There are times that we choose to be vindictive and ignore the plight of the poor. Darkness has power and it is very frightening when we recognize it within ourselves.

In this darkness we light the new fire. This is not just a statement that whistles in the darkness. It is a proclamation of our faith that Jesus Christ is truly risen and is alive and working in our world. The light fights back the darkness.

Why at night?

The Easter Vigil can only begin after sunset and must be complete before sunrise. Why during the night? The reason is found in the actual location of the resurrection of Jesus. It happened during the night. No one saw how and when the resurrection happened but we know that when the women (Jn. 20, 1) went to anoint the body with spices (to cover up the stench of decaying flesh) they found the tomb empty!

There are such contrasts in the resurrection. The disciples knew where the body of Jesus had been buried. They were unbelieving when they discovered that the tomb was empty. The disciples began to experience the risen Christ in the most unexpected of situations. Think of Mary Magdalene (Jn. 20, 11-18). She thought the man in the garden was a gardener. It was only when he called her name did she discover that this was Jesus: alive right now.

Toward the darkness of this night the resurrection throws a severe challenge. Evil and death do not have the last word. It is the resurrected Jesus that defeats all sin and evil.

Name the darkness. Stand with the light of Christ

Now, each of us who comes to the Easter Vigil must name the power of darkness that threatens our existence. It may be the brutality of war that destroys people and caused untold pain to people who are severely dislocated. It may be the greed of corporations and individuals who seek only their own interests and a hardened against the sufferings of others.

The darkness may be the angers that divide our families. Maybe you have a sister who refuses to talk to anyone in the family. Perhaps there are hardships over a business deal gone wrong within your local community. People are divided from each other. They need healing. They need light.

Bring each of these moments of darkness to your Easter Vigil. Christ has come to conquer all evil, sin and death. Stand tall for the light of Christ conquers all!



Be baptized as if for the first time

Our Church is trying to be reclaimed by Baptism. We have returned to the roots in the Scriptures and within the early Church and found that our teaching and practices are deficient.

Baptism is not an event. No one can get baptized. It is never like getting a tattoo done! Once a tattoo is on, it is on forever! But this comparison is so superficial. You can never get baptized; you are marked to live into the life of the baptized.

The early Church had it right. They were an illegal religion. They knew that they could not just accept anyone. All the candidates were prepared with a seriousness that would shock many of our present day Christians.

The Church called the candidates to conversion and a change of life. It they worshipped idols or the pagan gods they were to leave all this false religion behind. They were to make a break with their past and turn toward Jesus Christ, human and divine.

This process may have taken one to three years. The people of the church were not in any hurry to plunge the people into the waters. They laid a solid foundation to the faith.

Then there was a forty days of Lent which was like a spring-training camp. These were forty days of instruction, prayer and further conversion. Only after these years of preparation was the candidate brought to the waters of Baptism.

Baptism was always to mark a break in a person's life. They were to leave the old ways of neglecting God, of selfish pursuits and a selfish lifestyle behind. They had taken on a new identity: they were to become the living extension of Jesus Christ.

This is what we are seeking to recover: that powerful sense of identity that we are a living, working part of Christ.

Now no one can ever get baptized. It must never be like getting a tattoo. You pay for fee and the tattoo artist does his or her job. You walk out of that shop and it must be a decoration for the rest of your life.

Baptism is never a once for all. It is a lifetime commitment. You are baptized into the Christian way of life. You grow into being baptized. It takes an entire life time to become baptized.

Now, we know that this is off-putting for so many 'born' Christians. This means that they might not be baptized. They may only have had a religious ceremony imposed on them when they were babies. It leads no

where! What difference is there between their life now and the life of the indifferent or the unbeliever?

Baptism is always a challenge to respond and live like Jesus Christ. It is never a once for all event. It is like setting out on a long pilgrimage. It means walking throughout our entire life following Jesus and putting into practice his Gospel.

When you are baptized you are being missioned to share the very work of Jesus. It may mean that at your place of employment there are many racial slurs towards the new Canadians. People may be rather unwelcoming to these people who at first appear to be different. Being baptized means changing the atmosphere of the workplace into one of respect and welcome for those who are different from ourselves.

It may mean no longer ignoring the plight of the poor and the disadvantaged within our society. It is so easy just to walk by these people and not take notice of their struggles. Baptism leads us to open our hearts to the pain and the suffering of others.



***PRAY THAT THIS
EASTER VIGIL WILL BE
AN EXPERIENCE OF
PASSOVER TO THE
LAND OF THE RISEN
CHRIST.***



L: Eternal Father, who liberated the Hebrews from the slavery of Egypt,

All: Have mercy on us, your people.

L: Almighty Father, who have led your people through the hardships of the desert into the Promised Land.

All: Have mercy on us, your people.

L: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, who did penance for forty days in the desert and resisted the temptations of the devil.

All: Have mercy in us, your people.

L: Our divine Savior, who came to liberate us from the slavery of sin.

All: Come and save us, your people.

L: Redeemer of the world, who came to give us the life of grace.

All: Come and save us, your people.

L: King of glory, who want us to share in your victory over temptation and to lead us into the Promised Land of heaven.

All: Come and save us, your people.

L: Triumphant God, who have given us these days of grace to prepare ourselves for the glory of Easter.

All: We pray you, hear us.

L: You who want our sanctification through sacrifice, prayer and good works.

All: We pray you, hear us.

L: You who came to seek and save all men and to give all sinners the grace of conversion.

All: We pray you, hear us.

L: Lord Jesus Christ, send us your Holy Spirit to make us strong in temptation, steadfast in sacrifice, persevering in prayer and generous in charity.

L: Let us pray.

O God, we behold ancient miracles shining even in our day, for you now accomplish for all nations by means of the water of spiritual rebirth that saving action you performed for the chosen people in the land of Egypt.

Grant that the whole world may join in the ranks of your chosen people and share the prerogative of your children. Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

