



EASTER VIGIL 2008 MARCH 22, 2008 FR. JOE SOBIERAJSKI, S.J.

Reading 1 - Genesis 1:1-2:2 Reading 2 – Genesis 22:1-18

Reading 3 – exodus 14:15-15:1 Reading 4 – Isaiah 54:5-14

Reading 5 – Isaiah 55:1-11 Reading 6 – Baruch 3:9-15, 32-4:4

Reading 7 – Ezekiel 36:16-17a, 18-28

Epistle Romans 6:3-11 Gospel Matthew 28:1-10

One of my great nieces has become part of the hobby craze of scrapbooking. I suppose the basic idea of scrapbooking is not new but simply the keeping and organizing old photos and mementos, but the degree to which she uses her imagination and crafting skills to put simple photographs, old invitations, ticket stubs, and so on an attractive and memorable presentation is amazing. If you asked her why she does it, I think she would tell you that it is because family means a great deal to her, and this is her way of helping all of us keep memories alive. She has a big job in front of her if she intends to make real sense of the boxes of photographs that we have going all the way back to the twenties. And in order for her to do that she will have to rely on my mother and her living siblings simply to identify the individuals photographed and the event being celebrated. If she succeeds, however, we will then have a visual history of our family for nearly a hundred years.

Those kinds of memories are important not only for families, but they are also important for us as Church and as Christians since they tell us about our roots, about the people who have come before us with their sorrows and joys. It is their experiences that have in a real sense made us who we are, and in order to understand ourselves we need to understand them. While we have no scrap bookers going back into our salvation history, we do have prophets and evangelists who have left us a written record of our past, and whose writings create vivid pictures of memorable events from the past. In our celebration of this Vigil as we mark the most significant moment of our Christian history, the Resurrection of the Lord, we recall once again those other significant events that led to that crowning event, events from both the Old Testament and from the New.

The images that make up our history are very specific and yet they have a kind of universal resonance: images of life and death, despair and hope, darkness and light, slavery and freedom. These images not only tell the dramatic story of our spiritual life as God's people, they also remind us each of our own individual stories as we struggle with sin and darkness, sometimes avoiding the light which holds our freedom, a freedom that can only come from our relationship with God whose arms are always ready to embrace us, but whose embrace we sometimes go to great pains to avoid.

We have heard beautifully sung the great *Exsultet*, the proclamation of joy and salvation in which is recalled the *Felix culpa* or happy fault, the sin of our first parents which leads to our salvation in Christ. The background of our sinfulness leads us to focus on a portrait of God as prodigal in His desire to not only forgive us our sins but to hold us close to Himself. He is a God whose Love cannot be quantified, whose Love is beyond our comprehension. Without Him we have no history; without Him there are no memories to be captured and organized for us to remember.

Our reading from *Exodus*, however, begins to capture those memories with a succession of great images: the creation of the sky, land, vegetation, and of all living things including woman and man. These are images that God looks upon and declares that they are “very good.” Even when we separate ourselves from God by sin, He still sees enough “good” in us that His loving Heart and Hand breaks into our family history time and time again. When all else fails He sends His Son, Christ the Anointed One, to show us the way back to Him.

Exodus recounts one of those moments when He breaks into the history of our Hebrew ancestors in faith. He leads them from the slavery of Egypt through the waters of the Red Sea and offers them the opportunity to choose to be His people. As they were miraculously saved by the waters of the Red Sea, we are reminded that we too are saved by the waters of baptism, which make us His adopted sons and daughters. This image of salvation we will experience again as Andrew our catechumen is offered new life and freedom in the waters of baptism.

Our *Isaiah* reading captures a romantic moment in our history, in our relationship with God, in it is conveyed the tender love that the Lord has for Israel and by extension for the Church. Here He takes back the one who has been unfaithful, both Israel and us, vows an everlasting love, a love that is so deep; and so tender the even unto this day, He continues to seek reconciliation with us.

A few minutes ago this Church was lost in darkness, but as the Paschal Candle was brought in we experienced how the Risen Christ brought Light into our world. Paul reminds us in our reading from *Romans* that the Gift of Life and Light in Christ is ours at baptism. Water has been a strong symbol for us throughout the weeks of Lent. From the water flowing from the rock at Mirabah, to the Living Water offered to the Samaritan women, to the Water and Blood that flowed from Jesus’ side, to the water that will shortly flow in our baptismal pool where Andrew will die with Christ only to be raised to New Life in Him, we are reminded how the Lord offers us His Life and continues to strengthen us in it once we have received His gift.

Compared to the other Evangelists, Matthew’s account of the Resurrection is by far the most dramatic. Not only do we have an earthquake, but an angel descending from Heaven to

roll back the stone of the Tomb, and the shaken guards who appear like dead men. It appears to be the actual moment of the Lord's Resurrection, yet Matthew mentions nothing of Jesus Himself. All that we see is the angel and the empty Tomb, his words "Do not be afraid," and the news that Jesus is raised as He said. It is only on their way back to tell the disciples that the two Mary's encounter the Risen Lord, Who again tells them "Do not be afraid" and sends them on their way to inform the brothers. Put yourself in the place of these two women. They stood at the foot of the Cross with His Mother and witnessed His Death; they anointed His Body as He lay in the arms of His Mother. How their hopes must have seemed dashed at that time, but now they are told that the Lord lives. And then, they experience His Risen Glory for themselves as they embrace His feet. What a transformation they must have experienced! What a moment this is for our family history.

For both Matthew and Paul the Resurrection is the climax the central point of salvation history. Yet, they both see the importance of bringing our story into the present. Paul speaks to us as well as the Romans when he speaks about the Life that we have through baptism in Christ. Like the Mary's and the disciples He is to meet in Galilee, we too must see and meet Christ in our daily lives and proclaim to others that He is alive and living among us.

Andrew is about to have the waters of Baptism poured over him and in so doing will die with Christ, but he will also rise from the font glowing with the new life of the Holy Spirit, the Life of the Risen Christ. Then he along with Debbie, Nick and Steve will be anointed with the Oil of Chrism, as we pray that the Holy Spirit will enter them and strengthen them through the Sacrament of Confirmation. Here in their act of faith our family history is brought into the present. These new members of our family are both our present and our future. They testify not only to their own faith, but also to our faith and history that has now been handed on. This is an evening not only for recalling history, but also for making history. In these new members of our community we renew and testify to our own faith in Christ. Through and in them we asked that our faith be strengthened and shared.

Now as we listen to the words and actions of these four young people, I ask you to also use your imaginations and allow yourself to step into the Pool of Living Water. Let the Spirit pour into you, and let the water transform you as they did at your own baptism. With Andrew, Debbie, Nick, and Steve feel the weight of hands imposed upon your head, and beg for the Gifts of the Spirit. Let the perfumed Chrism flow onto your forehead, your face, your entire being. And feel the Spirit above you, below you, before you, behind you and in you. On this evening let the Holy Spirit give life to our history as a palpable force. And ask the Spirit to fill you not just this evening, but every morning, noon and night.

“Do not be afraid!” The Lord is risen, awaiting us at every turn so that our history will continue to be written in the words and deeds of all of us who believe.