

EASTER, BIRTH OF THE NEW COVENANT PEOPLE

Easter Vigil
April 14, 1979

Genesis 1:1-31, 2:1-2
Genesis 22:1-18
Exodus 14:15-31, 51:1
Isaiah 54:5-14
Isaiah 55:1-11
Baruch 3:9-15, 4:1-32
Ezekiel 36:16-28
Romans 6:3-15
Mark 16:1-18

My dear sisters and brothers.

Those who are not in the Cathedral on this solemn night of the Easter Vigil are unable to capture the beauty that you, who have gathered here in main Church of the Archdiocese, are able to appreciate and live. The Paschal candle in the center of the Church is a symbol of Christ, his resurrection, the people, the multitude that fill the nave, and the choir of this church and overflows outside

As a synthesis of the long liturgy of the word that has just ended, I entitle this homily as *At Easter the people of the New Covenant are born*. And to be brief, I restrict it to these three ideas: One, The two objects of the Easter celebration: the Risen Christ and the baptized; Two, Easter illuminates the history of God's covenant with humankind; Three, We are the people of the new Covenant.

The two objects of the Easter celebration: the Risen Christ and the baptized

This evening we come to celebrate not only the triumph of Christ as an event that occurred some twenty centuries ago but also to celebrate our own triumph, for we, those who have been baptized, are the Christ of today. Previously this was the night when Lent ended -- a beautiful procession of catechumens entered the Church and these were the people who would be baptized at the Easter Vigil. Dressed in white, they were a beautiful symbol of the Resurrection: a new life that was begun in the baptized.

We are privileged to have been baptized many years ago, and therefore, within a short time, we will renew our baptismal promises. Let us remember the meaning of the people who fill the Cathedral this evening, for the people are the Risen Christ. This is not only symbolized in the Paschal candle that was blessed during the opening procession that took place this evening, but more than the symbol of this candle, Christ is alive in 1979. On this Easter Day in San Salvador, Christ is risen and you, the Christian community, are witnesses of the fact that Christ continues to live. Blessed be God, for tonight this Diocese better understands its commitment to Christ who continues to live in our midst! The Church is the Body of Christ in history! We are the living Christ of 1979!

Easter illuminates the history of God's covenant with the people

My second thought revolves around this series of readings that the Holy Week Commission prepared (as an ecumenical gesture) and that you listened to as they were proclaimed by people of different religions --- all believers in Christ. As the Paschal candle illuminates the Cathedral tonight, so the resurrection of Christ illuminates the long history of God's covenant with the people --- we listened to this account that was proclaimed in the first reading that we just heard: *In the beginning ... God created the heavens and the earth* (1).

And the covenants began. Throughout the Lenten season we reflected on the different covenants that God established with his people. We saw God's continual love for people and despite the fact that this people rejected him, God continually attempted to win over their hearts. With Noah, under the sign of the rainbow, God established a covenant that sealed his desire to create. He created heaven and earth, the animals and everything that exists: *there shall not be another flood to devastate the earth* (2). God preserved the world of nature for the human race. He continued to see the human person as the most wonderful being of creation and asked the people to worship him as the only God. *I will maintain my covenant ...to be your God*. Noah gave thanks to God who had preserved the world of nature and now, this covenant with God, meant that God, the Creator, should be worshiped, his laws respected, the goods of this earth should be shared justly and nature should be cared for and preserved. This desire to destroy --- the danger of living in conditions of drought and contamination of the atmosphere, living in a place where there are no forests --- all of this is a form of the new flood. When we look at the rainbow, we discover God's will to preserve the natural world. Let us remember that the preservation of these natural resources that humanity needs is part of our covenant with God.

And He continues, as the readings show, no longer in the order of nature, but founding a religion and making a pact with man, a privileged nomad in the desert: Abraham. And what faith that man has! Old, without a homeland, pilgrim to an unknown place, he obeyed God who said to him: *I will make you a great nation from which will come a blessing for all peoples* (3). And Abraham, without understanding, is the father of our faith.

From Abraham, a new people is born. It appears that a third covenant was established when God spoke to Moses and commanded him to take the people from Egypt to their liberation in the Promised Land --- the Exodus event. All the readings that we have listened to this evening speak of God's presence with the Chosen People and this God will send the people a Redeemer.

The prophets announced this Redeemer to humankind and spoke about the conditions that God placed upon the people, conditions that had to be lived until the Redeemer was born. Tonight, the bells were rung to symbolize the fullness of time. Christ is with us and it is Christ who has died and has been raised to new life.

Jesus' covenant with men and women, this New Covenant that was announced by the prophets, is a definitive covenant, a covenant that *weds*. This evening we listened to the priest proclaim at the beginning of this liturgy: *Night truly blessed, when heaven is wedded to earth*¹. Later, when speaking about the sin of Adam, we heard: *O happy fault, O necessary sin of Adam, which gained for us so great a Redeemer!*². Sinners can rely on a Covenant of Reconciliation. Through the cross and the resurrection, a new people has come into existence --- through baptism the New Israel is born!

The people of the New Covenant are ourselves

In the reading from Saint Paul's letter, we listened to the development of this theme: everyone who is born of flesh, if they want to participate in this Covenant that God established with people, must be baptized. In baptism, the death of Christ becomes the death of the Christian and the resurrection of Christ becomes new life that is rooted in the heart of the Christian. From this perspective, Christians accept a commitment that we are going to renew this evening. We are speaking about a commitment of solidarity with the death and resurrection of Christ.

My dear sisters and brothers, this evening if we truly want to honor our relationship with this people that has gathered in the Cathedral to celebrate the Easter Vigil, let us consider whether we truly want to be baptized and through baptism become incorporated into the death of Christ: we must die. We must die to sin and all evil. We must root out all selfishness and envy and intrigue and idolatry. There is only one God and Christians worship God in Christ, our Lord. As Christians reject false idols, they might be asked to die as martyrs in order to remain faithful to this one God, but this God will raise them up to new life. Thanks to God, we are not only aware of the stories of the martyrs of past ages but we are also conscious of the martyrs of our own time. Priests, religious, catechists, and humble people from the rural area have been assassinated, beaten, crushed and persecuted because they remained faithful to the one God and Lord, Jesus Christ. Therefore, in the presence of this one God, we are going to renew our baptismal promises this evening or we can also say: *I am going to take a position and I will not tolerate this exclusiveness that you desire. I will not accept this command to follow in your ways nor your words to take up the cross and follow.*(4) We cannot serve two masters. (5) We cannot be Christians and promise fidelity to Christ and then betray this Christ and adore the god of wealth and power and luxury, the god of pride and selfishness and so many other false gods. Tonight is a night of fidelity before the One who was faithful unto death. Yes, he loved us! Even when this love meant death on a cross, he was not afraid and handed himself over to death for us. *We no longer live for ourselves* says St Paul *but for he who died and has risen as well* (6). *Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it* (7). On this night of the Resurrection, Christians understand the greatness of their faith and hope and place all their trust and love in Christ.

Thus we celebrate the joy of the resurrection of Jesus Christ not as individuals but as this new people with whom God has formed a covenant: *I will be your God and you will be my people* (8). Jesus Christ has sealed us with his blood and the glory of the resurrection. Therefore, as we stand at the foot of Mount Sinai, (9) we tell the Lord that we are his people and that we will do all that he asks of us. Amen

¹ Easter Proclamation (Exultet)

² *Ibid.*