

# PASCAL MYSTERY OURS THROUGH BAPTISM

**Holy Saturday, the Easter Vigil**  
**March 25, 1978**

*Genesis 1:1-2:2*

*Genesis 22:1-18*

*Exodus 14:15-15:1*

*Isaiah 54:5-14*

*Isaiah 55 1:11*

*Baruch 3:9-15, 33-4:4*

*Ezekiel 36:19-28*

*Romans 6:3-11*

*Matthew 28:1-10*

In the first reading from the book of Genesis, the Word of God has taken us back to the origins of the world and in the readings that followed we have been given an overview of salvation history which culminates this evening as we gather to celebrate the resurrection of the Lord. These events were not completed twenty centuries ago, but here in the Cathedral we are writing another chapter of this history. In light of this, my poor words are an attempt to apply the Word of God to our lives today and to remind both you and me to reflect on God's great love for us.

Reflect on the words from Genesis: *Let us make man in our image, after our likeness* (a) for here we find that the human person did not maintain his/her dignity but offended God. Through sin, men and women disfigured this likeness to God. God's divine Son, however, came to restore that image and this evening we celebrate the culmination of that redemptive work.

This evening we conclude the Easter Triduum. These three days are the greatest and most important days of the Liturgical Year and have given us an opportunity to reflect on three dimensions of our redemption: the suffering and passion of the redeemer on Good Friday; the silence of the tomb where the body of Jesus was laid to rest and the hope of the tomb; and this evening we reflect on the triumph of the resurrection. These three realities --- the sorrowful death, the burial and the resurrection --- constitute the Paschal Mystery.

The Paschal Mystery, the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus are a reality for us, a reality that has become part of us. All of these events in Christ's life would be in vain --- they would never become the definitive events of history --- unless every one of us makes these events a part of our lives. This is the meaning of tonight's celebration: the sorrowful passion, the expectation of the tomb and the triumph that we commemorate tonight has been assumed by us through baptism.

As we continue our celebration we are going to renew our baptism because these three dimensions of the Paschal Mystery which brought about our redemption have marked our lives from that time that our parents brought us to the baptismal font (in ancient times the catechumens were brought forward during the Easter Vigil celebration to be baptized and

confirmed). Saint Paul has just explained the meaning of Christian baptism: *We are indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in the newness of life* (b). My sisters and brothers, when we reflect on the life of modern men and women we see how these three aspects of the Paschal Mystery are so akin to the life of people today.

### **The suffering and the passion of the Redeemer that occurred on Good Friday**

As we reflected on the sorrowful passion of Jesus we realized that people today run away from pain. They do not want to experience suffering and yet no one is more convinced of pain and suffering than people today. They realize that they are not invincible. Despite the many advances in medicine, despite the countless remedies for suffering and pain that are available to us, nevertheless pain seems to reign supreme and suffering appears to be our heritage whether we like it or not. Therefore, the secret lies in giving some meaning to our suffering. Thus we see that baptism incorporates humankind with all their tragedies and pains into the body of Christ so that the suffering of their lives --- their hunger, their life on the margins of society, their pain --- might be converted, with Christ, into a redemptive suffering.

This evening we are able offer the Divine Risen Jesus all of our suffering because our suffering has been incorporated into his glorious wounds. Who here in the Cathedral or who among those listening to this broadcast has not experienced some type of suffering? What Christian does not carry some problem in their conscience? This evening Jesus invites us to unite ourselves to his suffering and cross. Jesus invites us to offer all our sufferings so that they might become divinized, enlightened with the light of Easter and filled with the hope of Easter. This is the night when the best gift that we have to bring before the divine Redeemer is that of our own suffering. For as we unite our suffering to the resurrection of Jesus our suffering becomes a redemptive suffering.

### **The silent tomb but the tomb of hope**

The second aspect of the Paschal Mystery is the burial of Holy Saturday. We refer to the silent tomb which was in no way a passive tomb, because our faith tells us that while the body of Jesus was buried on Good Friday afternoon and remained in the tomb until this evening, yet the blessed soul of Jesus was at work.

On the other side of history they were celebrating Palm Sunday. Christ had passed through the tunnel of painful death and his soul was found to be united with the holy ones of the Old Testament. There, Adam and Eve, Abraham, David, the patriarchs, the prophets, all the noble and holy people who lived before Jesus and who were unable to enter heaven because it had been closed to them by sin, now experienced the opening of that heaven. As our Creed tells us: *Christ descended into hell*. In other words, Christ entered the place of the dead, and the dwelling place of those who had died was filled with light. Palm Sunday was also meant for those people of the Old Testament, who together with the Risen Christ formed a procession of spirits that entered with Christ into the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus had come to redeem all people. He came not only to give rebirth to those who would follow him but to give new life to those who lived before him and were filled with the hope of the resurrection.

The silent tomb is a sign of our hope. Here, on this Easter night, the tomb becomes an empty tomb and becomes the greatest monument to Christian hope. We will also die; we will

succumb to pain and death; we will grow old. Will this be a reason to say that Jesus' redemption was ineffective? No! This simply tells us that there is a definitive phase in Christ's redemption and this definitive phase is found in the Divine Person. He has triumphed but the human race must still live with hope. We need to have hope.

My sisters and brothers, while we seem to be living at this time on a dead end street, nevertheless hope illuminates the horizon of the Christian community. The tomb of Christ, where it seems that the enemies of Christ had buried his victory, is where actually this evening, the chains are broken and the seal that had been placed there by his enemies cries out: *O death, where is your victory!* (c). In the same way that the tomb of Jesus breaks the chains of death, so too the tombs of our loved ones and our own tombs will one day be emptied.

It is necessary to nourish this hope, especially during these hours, my sisters and brothers, when many people attempt to resolve our political, social and economic problems with mere worldly solutions, using worldly means. Redemption, however, speaks to us about the true liberation of the human person that is the fruit of the triumphant Christ in whom we place all our hope. The greater our problem means that we must give more space to the Redeemer and also means that we have a greater need for hope. This is the night of hope, the night of Easter, the night of the empty tomb!

### **The triumph of the resurrection**

Therefore, my sisters and brothers, we now reflect on the third phase of the Paschal Mystery: the triumph. This is a night of triumph, a night of victory. But we celebrate a victory that has not created hatred and bloodshed and enemies. Victories that are achieved by bloodshed are shameful. Victories that are won by brute force are animal victories. The victory that we celebrate tonight is one of faith --- the victory of Jesus *who did not come to be served but to give his life as a ransom for many* (d). The triumph of Jesus' love is a peaceful triumph. Death's triumph was not definitive and therefore tonight we celebrate the definitive triumph of life over death! The triumph of peace! The triumph of joy! The triumph of Alleluia! The triumph of the Resurrection of the Lord!

Yet in this triumph, my sisters and brothers, I speak about two phases and let us keep these phases in mind. The first phase is rooted in the fact that the person of Christ was crowned with absolute victory. He is the King of life and the King of Eternity. Saint Paul has just told us that: *We know that Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more* (e). In Jesus, redemption has been achieved. But in us, this evening, we as a Christian community are going to renew our baptismal commitment because we know that victory is still not ours and that we must await that definitive victory. The banner of suffering and pain and sin and death is raised in our world. This does not mean that the sins of humankind have caused the death and resurrection of Jesus to fail. No! All of this simply tells us that now is the time for the Church. Between the resurrection of Christ and the Second Coming we have no idea how much time will pass. We do, however, know that the covenant of victory over sin and hell and death has been sealed by the victory of Christ's resurrection. We also know that God has passed on to his Church the administration of this victory of Christ which now involves the Church in a process of changing the hearts of humankind. This is at the center of the tremendous work of evangelization, the work of reconciling people with God, the work of bringing the Blood of Christ to the hearts of all people, the work of planting the love of God in the midst of all hatred, the work of sowing peace among all people and justice in all human

relationships and respect for the rights of the human person who was sanctified by the redemption of the Lord.

This work of the Church supposes bloody struggles and painful conflicts; but these are part of the Passover of Christ, a Passover that will not be completely fulfilled until Christ returns again. On this night the Church awaits the dawn. Listen to the words of the Easter Proclamation when we sang the glory of the Paschal Candle, a thick candle with the cross in the middle and lit in the midst of this Assembly. This candle is a symbol of Christ and represents the Church that illuminates the night with the light of Christ. The deacon sang: *May the night remain illuminated until the morning light announces that now there is no need for this candle. It is day! The brightness of the new day illuminates the people who journey on this earth.* This Easter candle represents the Church and as long as it is night, the candle burns until the first light of morning. Christ who will return and Christ, the Risen One whom we do not now see in the splendor of his glory, is acting through the Church that preaches, forgives, sanctifies and guides the souls of those who allow themselves to be guided.

My sisters and brothers, we are going to conclude this liturgy of the Word with the renewal of baptismal commitment. We are going to bless the water that will be used to baptize the children at the font where we were incorporated into this Paschal Mystery. Tonight is beautiful not only because Christ has risen from the depths of pain and from the tomb but rather this night is beautiful because this tomb and this victory have become ours. They have become ours because thanks to baptism that was instituted by Christ all people who are born of flesh by baptism become incorporated into him, and thus we become children of the redemption, eligible for glory and eternal victory.

*Margin References* (a) Gn 1,26: (b) Rm 6,4: (c) 1Cor 15,55: (d) Mt 20,28: (e) Rm 6,9.