

**Homily for Holy Saturday at the
Easter Vigil in the Holy Night of Easter
March 31, 2018**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois**

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Reverend Fathers, deacons, consecrated religious, and my dear brothers and sisters in Christ: *Do not be amazed!* Saint Mark's Gospel that we have just heard tells us that this was the rather unusual message that the young man clothed in a white robe and sitting in the empty tomb had delivered to the women who brought spices very early in the morning at sunrise so that they could anoint the body of Jesus.¹ On entering the tomb and seeing, not the shrouded body of Jesus, but this young man sitting there, we are told that "they were utterly amazed."² Of course they were amazed! So why does this angelic figure tell them not to be amazed?

To be amazed means to be astonished, astounded, surprised, stunned, staggered, shocked, stupefied, awed; it means to stop people in their tracks, take their breath away and leave them dumbfound. All of these are quite natural reactions to the supernatural event of someone rising from the dead. But the message – *Do not be amazed!* – suggests first of

all that the resurrection should not come as a shock and surprise, since the prophets and Jesus Himself had foretold this would happen. Second, being in a state of amazement can leave a person paralyzed by fright, that is, immobilized by fear and quite unable to take any action. But it is precisely action that the young man in the white robe wants these women to take, namely, to go and tell the other disciples, especially Peter – who three times had denied our Lord – that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead.

That message of being stirred to action pertains to us as much as it did to the women at the tomb. The account of Our Lord's resurrection should not leave us mystified by this mystery of our faith or mesmerized in bewildered fascination by this extraordinary event; rather we are sent as missionary disciples to bring others to believe in the Resurrection of Christ. To be a disciple means to be a follower of the Risen Lord; to be a missionary means to be sent out to bring others to share this faith. Doing this, of course, is not easy, for there are many obstacles along the way.

This is the significance of another detail of this Gospel passage, namely, the question the women were asking each other as they approached the tomb: "Who will roll back the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?"³ Saint Mark notes that the stone "was very large."⁴

That stone is a metaphor. It represents all the obstacles to accepting Jesus Christ as our Sovereign Lord and our Saving Redeemer. Yet, for those willing to approach the tomb, the stone is rolled back. It takes faith to accept the resurrection. It takes faith to encounter the Risen Lord. It is God's grace that rolls back that very large stone and beckons us to enter the realm of faith.

The Church's celebration of the Easter mystery is an act of faith; it is our coming to the tomb; it leads us to look up and see that the stone has been rolled away; it is our encounter with the rising sun that leads us to the Risen Son of God. Like the women at the tomb, we see that He is risen and we hear the most joyous good news!

Tonight we rejoice that God's grace has rolled away the obstacles and has made it possible for those who will receive the sacraments of initiation and reception into full communion with the Catholic Church to enter into the mystery of faith. Tonight's Mass—indeed every Mass—is a celebration of the mystery of faith that we proclaim right after the words of consecration: *We proclaim your Death, O Lord, and profess your Resurrection, until you come again.* This is the central mystery of our faith as celebrated in the Eucharist!

Tonight's liturgy is a celebration of two resurrections: the resurrection of Jesus and our own resurrection as well! Saint Paul explained that truth in his Letter to the Romans that we heard in our Epistle tonight: *Just as Christ was raised from the dead . . . we shall also be united with Him in the resurrection.*⁵

Our liturgy of this Easter Vigil began tonight in darkness, "this being the image of the profound darkness in which humanity was plunged without Christ, without the revelation of God. . . . The resurrection of Christ is a powerful call to apostolate: to be light and carry the light to others."⁶

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Mark 16: 1-4; 6.

² Mark 16:5.

³ Mark 16:3.

⁴ Mark 16:4.

⁵ Romans 6:4-5.

⁶ Francis Fernandez, *In Conversation with God, Daily Meditations, Volume Two: Lent and Eastertide* (London - New York: Scepter, 1987), pp. 315-316.