

## **EASTER VIGIL, APRIL 3&4, 2021**

### **GOD'S WONDROUS LOVE FOR US**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We are participating in the night vigil, the greatest and most noble of all solemnities (Roman Missal). We are like the Israelites on the night God delivered them from the bondage and slavery in Egypt (Exodus 12:42). We are like the faithful servants who are dressed, ready and waiting for the master's return from the wedding to open for him once he knocks at the door (Luke 12:35-37).

As I listened and read through the readings of this Easter vigil what stands out to me is God's love, a love without measure. From the story of the creation to the death and resurrection of his Son, God shows that he will never abandon us. His love is stronger than death. Through the Prophet Isaiah. The Lord assures us: "I have sworn not to be angry with you, or to rebuke you. Though the mountains leave their place and the hills be shaken, my love shall never leave you nor my covenant of peace be shaken, says the Lord, who has mercy on you" (Isaiah 54:10).

God is a loving parent but infinitely greater than any parent. Our walk with God is like our walk with our parents. Our parents conceived us, gave birth to us, nurtured us until we could stand on our own. Even when we are adults and seemingly self-sufficient, our parents still love care and worry. If they are alive, they are still interested in what goes on with us. They love their children and grandchildren with love beyond comparison.

As awesome as the parents' love is, God's love is far greater. God created us out of love and when we came to grief through sin God redeemed us. He does not say, "You blew it, you must fix it." God walks with us every step of the way. From conception till we get to heaven. God does not stop working for our wellbeing and redemption. While he was dying on the cross, he was redeeming us. He was the Paschal Lamb. What takes my breath away is realizing that on Holy Saturday morning and while still buried in the tomb, Jesus descended into hell (not the hellfire but to hades) and liberated our holy ancestors. Picturing Christ on this saving mission to the underworld, an ancient homily captured it marvelously, "I am your

God, who for your sake have become your son. Out of love for you and for your descendants I now by my own authority command all who are held in bondage to come forth, all who are in darkness to be enlightened, all who are sleeping to arise. I order you, O sleeper, to awake. I did not create you to be held a prisoner in hell. Rise from the dead, for I am the life of the dead. Rise up, work of my hands, you who were created in my image. Rise, let us leave this place, for you are in me and I am in you; together we form only one person, and we cannot be separated" (An Ancient Homily on Holy Saturday).

The Easter proclamation (Exsultet) puts it breathtakingly, "O love, O charity beyond all telling, to ransom a slave you gave away your Son! O truly necessary sin of Adam, destroyed completely by the Death of Christ! O happy fault that earned so great, so glorious Redeemer! "Dearly Beloved in Christ, God fights our battles. Our fall in Adam did not mean the end of us. God took care of it. He raised us up and united us with him. "Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were 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 newness of life" (Romans 6:3-4).

### **WHY IS THIS NIGHT SPECIAL?**

It was the night when God led our forebears, Israel's children, from slavery in Egypt and made them pass dry-shod through the Red Sea. It was the night Christ rose from the dead. It is the end of gloom and darkness. It sets Christians apart from worldly vices and from the gloom of sin leading them to grace and joining them to his holy ones. It dispels wickedness, washes faults away, restores innocence to the fallen, and joy to mourners, drives out hatred, fosters concord, and bring down the mighty. This is the night, when Christ broke the prison-bars of death and rose victorious from the underworld truly blessed night, worthy alone to know the time and hour when Christ rose from the underworld!" (Exsultet).

What shall we give to the Lord in return for what he did for us? We shall worship him and praise his holy name all the days of our lives. May each one of us uniting his voice to the Psalmist say to the Lord. "I will extol you,

for you drew me clear and did not let my enemies rejoice over me. You brought me up from the netherworld; you preserved me from among those going down into the pit" (Psalm 30:4-5). May this be not only with our lips but with our lives. St Paul reminds us; you too must think of yourselves as being dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:11). The key is to love God who died and rose from the dead and to love our neighbor as he loves us. The question for each one of us is, "Have I loved enough? Have I called the families of those who have lost loved ones from COVID-19, or in other ways, this year? Have I offered to support those who are ill by bringing them food, medicine or other provisions? Have I reached out to my brothers and sisters in faith, whom I have not seen recently, and invited them to reconnect with the community? Have I worked in tangible ways for justice for all, so that all human beings may know they have inherent dignity and worth? Have I sent cheerful cards or letters to those who are alone or especially anxious? Have I actively worked for peace and against racism? Have I given generously, when able, to help those facing financial hardship? Have I shared the message of Christ with those who are separated from him?" (Gretchen et al, Editorial, Sunday Visitor).