

EASTER VIGIL – April 3, 2010
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Our Lenten observance has ended; we have remembered with sadness the betrayal of Jesus, his arrest, suffering, death and burial, but now we begin this Easter season in great joy: Jesus Christ is risen from the dead! He has won the victory over sin and death once and for all; as St. Paul said in his letter to the Romans, “We know that Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more; death no longer has power over him.” I know I speak for all our parish staff in wishing you and all your loved ones a most blessed and joyous Easter.

There is nothing like this Easter Vigil celebration; it is truly the high point, the summit of the entire Church year and liturgical calendar. So much is going on, so much for us to observe and absorb and take part in. It is certainly a spiritual and prayerful experience of joy, but it also engages our physical, bodily existence as well. We speak about the physical senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, touching and tasting; the Easter Vigil involves all those senses, all of which highlight in different ways the glory of Jesus’ rising from the dead:

1. sense of seeing: we began this Vigil outside in the darkness in order to focus on the Service of Light—the blessing of the Easter fire. Just as God began his work of creation by saying “Let there be light”, our celebration of the new covenant in the risen Christ begins with the fire and the lighting of our new Easter candle. That candle was then brought into the darkened church (and your candles were lit from it) as we sang “Christ our light”—the light that helps us see and that shines through the darkness of sin and unbelief.

2. sense of hearing: at the Easter Vigil we hear the proclamation of the word of God in an extraordinary Liturgy of the Word. All those readings are done not just to take up time, but to remind us of some of the many crucial highlights of salvation history—from the creation of the world and especially of man in God’s image and likeness to his re-creation and redemption in the crucified and risen Jesus. The more we hear and are reminded of God’s past fidelity to his promises, the more we are reassured of his continued faithfulness to and love for us.

3. sense of smell: you have already noticed our more-than-usual use of incense tonight—at the Easter candle and the book of the gospels, and it will be used again at the preparation of the gifts. We place incense on the hot coal; it produces a fragrant smoke which rises, symbolizing our prayers rising to God. The Old Testament attests to the use of incense in the adoration and worship of God offered by the Jewish people in whom we Christians find our roots. What could be more fitting than to use this sweet-smelling incense to add special solemnity to our praise and worship of Jesus Christ, risen from the dead?

4. sense of touch: we will soon have the blessing of water for our baptismal font and holy water stoups. Then after we renew our baptismal promises, I will process through this church sprinkling you with that newly-blessed water. You will feel that water on you, and you will dip your fingers in that water to bless yourselves when you leave tonight. The touch of the water will remind you of your own baptism—you were buried with Christ in those waters, and you rise from those waters as Jesus rose to new life from the grave.

5. sense of taste: the obvious connection here is receiving the Body and Blood of Jesus, his Real Presence, in the sacrament of the Eucharist. The familiar hymn says it so well: “Taste and see, taste and see the goodness of the Lord.” We receive Holy Communion at every Mass, of course, but to do so at the Easter Vigil unites us with the risen Christ in a uniquely profound way. Since Jesus is the Son of God who rose from the dead, he can and does make his presence very real to us—one we can approach with our senses and sustained by our faith.

It is important to know how our five bodily senses help us to celebrate this great feast of Easter. Jesus, the Son of God, came to us in a human body when he was conceived in his Mother's womb, he died on the Cross and his dead body was buried in a tomb, and then he rose gloriously from the dead, body and soul reunited forever, never again to be separated. And what has already happened to Jesus, we hope for and look forward to as well. Jesus' resurrection from the dead verifies and gives all need credence to his teaching that our bodies, senses and all, will be raised from the dead and forever reunited with our souls as well at the end of time. What a priceless gift we have received: the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and our new and firm hope for eternal life, body and soul together, in heaven! God grant that we always live this Easter faith with great joy and gladness!