

EASTER VIGIL -- April 11, 2009  
Fr. Jerry Kopacek

Several years ago I read of a family who was watching "The Greatest Story Ever Told", a movie about the life of Christ. One of the children was a seven-year-old who was deeply moved by the story; as Jesus was walking with the Cross toward Calvary, tears rolled down her cheeks. She was absolutely silent until after Jesus had been placed in the tomb. Then, catching her parents' eyes, she suddenly grinned and said "Now comes the good part!" The good part indeed--we have observed the tragedy of Good Friday, but now we are privileged to celebrate the joy of Easter. Jesus Christ is risen, never to die again! The lasting power of sin and death is destroyed once and for all, and eternal life and joy in heaven is made possible for us once again. I certainly want to wish all of you and all your loved ones a most blessed Easter day and season--may the joy of the risen Christ be yours on this glorious night and always.

One of the many highlights of the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday night is the extraordinarily rich Liturgy of the Word with more Scripture readings than usual. The reason for those extra readings, especially from the Old Testament, is to remind us that Jesus' death and resurrection did not occur in a vacuum. Rather, they are the crowning events in a long history of God working for and with his people, his human creation. We began with the story of God as creator of all from the first chapter of Genesis. Then we heard of his victory for Israel at the Red Sea over the forces of pharaoh and Egypt. After that, we heard God's word spoken through his prophets, calling his people back to himself and continuing to promise them his help and salvation.

And did you catch the kind of language God used in speaking through those prophets? He spoke not as an angry, vengeful God who delights in inflicting punishment--not at all. Instead, he speaks as one who loves his people, longs for and thirsts for them, wanting to call them back to himself and embrace them. Hear again his words spoken through Isaiah: "The One who has become your husband is your maker...the Lord calls you back, like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit...with great tenderness I will take you back...with enduring love I take pity on you." God who is almighty, eternal, all-powerful--this same God uses the language and image of marriage to describe his love for his people. You who are married: think of those times when you are most deeply aware of your love and desire for one another, when you most intensely experience your oneness with each other. And then realize that that is only the faintest shadow of God's love for each one of us and of the depths of his infinite desire for us!

Isaiah also extends to us God's invitation: "All you who are thirsty, come to the water." Just as God thirsts for us, we thirst for God and communion with him--whether we are always aware of that thirst or not. Jesus Christ, the divine Word that became flesh and who died on the Cross and rose from the dead, he is the way by which we can attain that communion. And so for nearly 2000 years now, the Church has been spreading the good news of the risen Christ and inviting people and nations of all times and places to satisfy their thirst for truth, love, meaning and eternal life in that same Christ.

And tonight at this Easter Vigil, we welcome and celebrate with special joy those among us who have experienced that thirst and who desire now to be received into full Communion with Jesus Christ and the Church he established on the rock of St. Peter:

--Alayna Nielsen, Bonnie Patrick and David Jones, we are graced by your presence with us tonight. It will be my joy to baptize and confirm you, and then to give you Holy Communion for the first time; you will receive all three sacraments of initiation. Devon Daniels, I welcome you also and look forward to baptizing you as well.

--Angie Hileman, you have already been baptized in another Christian community of faith--and it will be my joy tonight to receive you into full communion with the Catholic Church through your

profession of faith and your receiving confirmation and Eucharist.

--Cheyenne, Elijah and Jonah Carleton, you were baptized in the Catholic Church when you were very young, and tonight I look forward to conferring on you the sacrament of Confirmation and giving you Holy Communion for the first time.

--and last but certainly not least, we welcome Landon Weber who has already received baptism and Eucharist and who will tonight receive confirmation as well.

It is indeed a real joy to welcome you all here tonight, and your families and loved ones. I thank you very much for the good work and diligent effort you have made in preparing for these sacraments, and I am deeply grateful as well to all those who have helped you through your preparations. May the risen Lord bring to completion and fulfillment the good work he has begun in you; may you always grow in your love and your thirst for the risen Christ who first loved and thirsted for you and who desires you for his own.