



The Holy See

EASTER VIGIL

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II

Holy Saturday, 30 March 2002

1. "God said: 'Let there be light'; and there was light" (Gen 1:3).

An explosion of light, which God's word brought forth from nothing, rent asunder *the first night, the night of Creation*.

The Apostle John will write: "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 Jn 1:5). God did not create darkness but light! And the Book of Wisdom, clearly revealing that God's work has always had a positive purpose, puts it thus: "He created all things that they might exist; and the creatures of the world are wholesome, and there is no destructive poison in them; and the dominion of Hades is not on earth" (Wis 1:14).

In that first night, the night of Creation, is rooted the Paschal Mystery which, following the tragedy of sin, *represents the restoration and the crowning* of that first beginning. The divine Word called into existence all things and, in Jesus, became flesh for our salvation. And if the destiny of the first Adam was to return to the earth from which he had been made (cf. Gen 3:19), the last Adam has come down from heaven in order to return there in victory, the first-fruits of the new humanity (cf. Jn 3:13; 1 Cor 15:47).

2. *Another night* constitutes the fundamental event of the history of Israel: *it is the wondrous Exodus from Egypt, the story of which is read each year at the solemn Easter Vigil*.

"The Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. The people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left" (Ex 14:21-22). The People of God was born from this "baptism" in the Red Sea, when it experienced the powerful hand of the Lord who snatched it from slavery in order to lead it to the yearned-for land of freedom, justice and peace.

This is the *second night, the night of the Exodus*.

The prophecy of the Book of Exodus is fulfilled today also for us, who are Israelites according to the Spirit, descendants of Abraham because of faith (cf. *Rom 4:16*). In his Passover, as the *new Moses*, Christ has made us pass from the slavery of sin to the freedom of the children of God. Having died with Jesus, with him we rise to new life, thanks to the power of his Spirit. His Baptism has become our baptism.

3. You too will receive this Baptism, which brings us into a new life, dear catechumens *from different countries*: from Albania, China, Japan, Italy, Poland, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Two of you, a Japanese mother and a Chinese mother, have each brought their child, so that, in the same celebration, the mothers and the children will be baptized together.

"On this most holy night", when Christ rose from the dead, you too will experience a spiritual "exodus": leave behind your former life and enter the "land of the living". This is *the third night*, the night of the Resurrection.

4. "Most blessed of all nights, chosen by God to see Christ rising from the dead!". We sang these words in the *Easter Proclamation* at the beginning of this solemn Vigil, the Mother of all Vigils.

After the tragic night of Good Friday, when "the power of darkness" (*Lk 22:53*) seemed to have prevailed over the One who is "the light of the world" (*Jn 8:12*), *after the great silence of Holy Saturday*, in which Christ, having completed his work on earth, found rest in the mystery of the Father and took his message of life into the pit of death, *behold at last the night which precedes "the third day"*, on which, in accordance with the Scriptures, the Messiah would rise, as he himself had often foretold to his disciples.

"Night truly blessed, when heaven is wedded to earth and man is reconciled to God!" (*Easter Proclamation*).

5. *This is the night of nights, the night of faith and of hope*. While all is shrouded in darkness, *God – the Light – keeps watch*. With him there keep watch all who hope and trust in him.

O Mary, this is truly *your night!* As the last lights of the Sabbath are extinguished, and the fruit of your womb rests in the earth, your heart too keeps watch! *Your faith and your hope look ahead*. Behind the heavy stone, they already detect the empty tomb; behind the thick veil of darkness, they glimpse the dawn of the Resurrection.

Grant, O Mother, that we too may keep watch in the silence of the night, believing and hoping in the Lord's word. Thus shall we meet, in the fullness of light and life, Christ, the first-fruits of the risen, who reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. Alleluia!

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