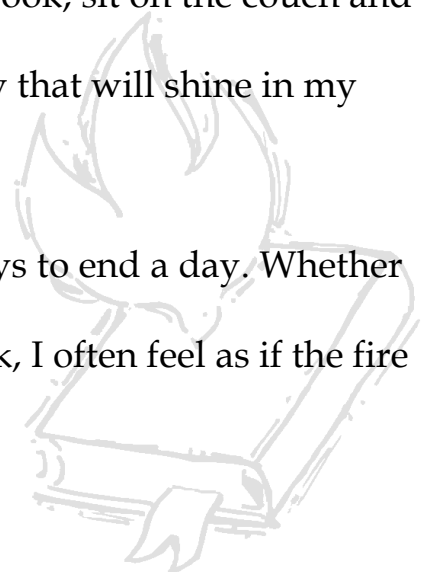


Homily
Easter Vigil - C
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
April 20, 2019

Acts 10: 34, 37-43
Ps 118: 1-2, 16-17, 22-23
Col 3: 1-4
Jn 20: 1-9

There will be a time after I have celebrated all these services during Holy Week, having laid into the pineapple-glazed ham pierced with spicy cloves that Maria Jankowski has no business feeding to my dog where I will dream about sleeping for an entire week with an open window to let the Spring air into my room and pretending that my imaginary fireplace is crackling with the sound of a nice fire to keep me warm (we actually have a fireplace in the rectory but the chimney is cracked and has not been cleaned for years; I'm too much of a coward to use it, so I just imagine that the fireplace is working in my dreams). In my dreams, I will kick off my shoes, pick up a book, sit on the couch and fall asleep ten minutes later in front of that glow that will shine in my house throughout the night.

For me, a fire is one of the most soothing ways to end a day. Whether I spend time in front of it with a friend or a book, I often feel as if the fire



has some type of therapeutic value, a value that cannot be understood but must be experienced. In fact, during the Easter Vigil I felt a great calm during the Mass in that I was directly watching the Easter Fire which was burning right in front of me, outside the glass doors during the two hour liturgy. For me, I was able to spend time with our Lord's own personal fireplace during the most sacred liturgy of the year.

In the rituals of our faith and culture, fire can represent something that is destructive and as something that gives life. In the world of destruction, we talk about the fires of hell consuming those who do not accept God into their lives. We see how fire can destroy homes and lives. And prior to the Season of Lent, we use fire to burn the palms from the previous Lenten Season so that we may begin Ash Wednesday with the ashes from the palms.

In the world of life, fire becomes a wonderful symbol as well. A third century theologian named Origen saw fire as something purifying, something through which a soul passed in order to prepare itself for an entry into heaven. Heat gives water the ability to clean clothes and

dishes and floors. Heat allows metallic objects to bend and melt so that tools and structures can be fashioned and built up. And in the world of faith, this heat provides the light that begins our Easter Season.

It is this Easter Fire that becomes the focal point of our Easter Vigil Service and this Easter Candle. There we are, beginning the Saturday Evening Service in complete darkness. The sun has left the night sky and the darkness of night symbolizes the Season of Lent. Throughout six weeks we have lived without this light and have focused on the darkness of our sin. We have realized that without this light, we would never find our way to heaven.

And then, there it is; there we see the light. In the darkness of the night, Christ appears in this Easter Fire. The priest blesses the fire, lights a taper, and carries the taper to the Easter Candle. And within the darkness, one taper begins to light another from this fire, and the church slowly becomes illumined by this Easter light.

And as the Easter Candle is placed in its resting spot within the sanctuary, a member of the parish sings a song of light, the Exultet. The

candles are extinguished, with the sole light of Christ represented by the Easter Candle. And as we pass through the darkness of the Old Testament into the light of the New, eventually all the lights of the church shine brightly, for the light of Christ fills the room with the glow of grace. With this light, we recognize that it is Christ that illumines our lives. In this light, we find hope.

For the last six weeks or so, we have spoken about the darkness that exists in. Because we are sinners, because we often fail in life, we often feel like we live in the darkness. When our savior came down into the world, there was a time in our history when the world seemed the darkest, a time when we sacrificed our one chance at hope in order to satisfy our own human ego. And here is the funny thing, something that will always give us hope in our lives: even when we crucified our Lord, he offered us the gift of love, anyway. No matter how bad things have been in our human history, whenever we turn to God, we encounter every morning the gift of a sunrise. There will always be the hope of

God in our lives. There will always be the love that the people in this Church offer each other as a Christian community.

We celebrate the season of Easter because we have learned that this light of God will never leave us in our life. Even in the darkest times, if we look to God, we will receive this light. Even if we are the most separated from God, his love will never leave those who look for the sunrise. We sit here tonight and think about all the words of hope that Christ has offered us in the scriptures: "Come, all you who are burdened, and I will give you rest" (see Mt 11: 28-30); "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you" (Jn 15: 9); "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8: 12).

As a minister of God, I look at the things you do, at the ways you love and serve each other. I think about the good sisters who have been planning these liturgies over the last few weeks, about those who have joined us to remember the gift of service on Holy Thursday and of the Cross on Good Friday. There is so much love in this world that it is like

the sunrise never leaves us, but yet there is so much anger and pain in this world as well that people do not see the light of Easter, either.

During this season of Easter, I encourage you all to celebrate well. Look at that Easter candle. Look at the gift of life that Christ offered us. Look at the gift of life in the hearts of our elect. In a short while, we will bless the new water of Easter, the new water of our life that washes away our old selves and brings us closer to God. Our life has changed. The thirst, the hunger, the darkness is no longer with us when we enter this Church – we always see the light of Christ. The question is, do we keep this light and let it shine for others or do we just remember the light today and put it away until next year?

I invite all of you to take some time this Easter season and remember those people in the world who have not seen that sunrise. I encourage all of you to be that sunrise for others. There is something beautiful in the light of a new day. Today, we receive it again for the first time. As Jesus says in the eighth chapter of John's gospel, "I am the light of the

world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (Jn 8: 12).

May all of you experience a blessed and light-filled Easter. May you all experience the beauty of that sunrise in the people that you meet, in the things that you do. This is our prayer.