

## **EASTER VIGIL 2023**

### **Homily of Bishop John Barres**

#### **St. Agnes Cathedral**

**April 8, 2023**

Esta noche, en la Liturgia de esta Vigilia de Pascua del 2023, celebramos el símbolo conmovedor de la Resurrección en el fuego de vigilia de Pascua recién encendido. Es un fuego nuevo que purifica nuestras vidas, nos abre a los dones y frutos del Espíritu Santo y nos lleva a la misión.

Es un fuego nuevo que compartimos de persona a persona hasta que toda la iglesia queda encendida y esto simboliza el fuego de la fe católica que los discípulos misioneros han compartido providencialmente con nuestros catecúmenos.

Hemos celebrado la preparación de la vela pascual, que es un símbolo constante de la resurrección y el misterio pascual que tenemos en nuestros santuarios. Mientras insertaba cinco granos de incienso en la vela, en forma de cruz, dije esta oración: "Por sus llagas / santas y gloriosas / nos proteja / y nos guarde / Jesucristo nuestro Señor".

Las llagas santas y gloriosas de Cristo Resucitado tocan nuestras heridas espirituales, emocionales y físicas para que podamos ser los instrumentos de Cristo Resucitado que ayuden a sanar las heridas del mundo. Las heridas santas y gloriosas de Cristo Resucitado tocan también las heridas de los que sufren en Ucrania.

Nos maravillamos hoy, unidos, del rico panorama de las lecturas de la Vigilia de Pascua, que siguen el rastro del arco de la historia de la salvación e ilustran el poder de la Resurrección de Jesucristo.

At the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday, Fr. Matthew Browne said: "As we reflect on the gift of the Eucharist and the priesthood, both of which we celebrate this evening, we come to the stark realization that neither exists for themselves. The Eucharist is the 'supreme activity' of *the entire Church*.<sup>1</sup> It is the 'source and

---

<sup>1</sup> Yves Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, 138.

summit’ of every Christian life.<sup>2</sup> It is the apex to which everything we do as the Church is directed, and it is the font from which all of our power flows.<sup>3</sup> And the priesthood only exists for the sake of the Church. Our lives as priests, in communion with our bishop, are centered on our ministry to the People of God...

A professor of mine once shared this story with us of a bishop who was being given a tour a new Church in his diocese. Because of certain fire codes, the Church was built with bright orange signs over each exit, which read ‘FIRE EXIT’. The parish priest apologized to the bishop for this as he saw it as destroying the aesthetics of the Church. The bishop paused, turned towards the parish priest, looked at him with a smile, and said: ‘Father, *if only* every door of each our Churches had the words ‘FIRE EXIT’ over them.’ What that bishop meant was this: each time we celebrate the Eucharist – every time we are embraced by the love of God in holy communion – we ought to leave here, set on fire for mission. We should be *burning* to go out into the world to bring the light of Christ to it by the way that we live our lives. The Eucharist *should* make the Church!”

At the Celebration of the Lord’s Passion on Good Friday, Fr. Lachlan Cameron said: “This hour is the Lord’s. He longed for it, and now it has arrived. *It is the hour for him to pass from this world to the Father and so be glorified.* This is his hour, *when having loved his own in the world, he loves them to the end* - completely, totally, unreservedly, with arms outstretched between heaven and earth. In this hour, the Lord Jesus is lifted up on the Cross. He is *raised high and greatly exalted.* In this hour, what he foretold comes to be: *Lifted up from the earth, he draws all people to himself.* He draws us to himself.”

---

<sup>2</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, §11.

<sup>3</sup> See, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, §10.

Within the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, there is the site of Calvary and the Crucifixion and the site of the Resurrection, the Tomb of Christ often called the “Edicule.”

There is an inscription right outside the Edicule that reads: “This is the Center of the World.” That is what we celebrate at this Easter Vigil – that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the Center of the World, the Center of our Catholic Faith and the Center of our Existence.

In 2016 and 2017, there was some significant archaeological and restorative work done on Christ’s tomb.

During this restoration work, scientists discovered that much of the Edicule rests on a fragile foundation of unstable rubble, decayed mortar and tunnels.

So more archaeology and more foundational reinforcement will continue to be necessary to preserve the Edicule.<sup>4</sup>

Just as the foundation of Christ’s Tomb in Jerusalem at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre needs to be reinforced and strengthened, so too do our lives.

This Easter Vigil is a time for us to realize even more deeply that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the very foundation of our lives.

St. Paul writes: “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile.” (1 Cor 15:17)

The Resurrection of Christ is the foundation of our faith and the “fulcrum” of Salvation history and of our lives on earth.

Tonight at this Easter Vigil Liturgy 2023<sup>5</sup>, we celebrate the moving Resurrection symbolism of the freshly lit Easter Vigil fire. It is fresh fire that purifies our lives, opens us to the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit and drives us on mission.

---

<sup>4</sup> See Cecile Lemoine, “Holy Sepulcher, the Work in Progress,” in *Holy Land Review*, Spring 2023, Volume 16 #2, 16-17.

<sup>5</sup> For a theological, liturgical, spiritual and historical analysis of the Easter Vigil, see Bishop Barres’ Holy Week 2020 Pastoral Letter *The Great Week: A Pilgrimage with the Lord in Holy Week*, 14-18.

The Easter Vigil fire is a fresh fire that we share person to person until the whole Church is lit and it symbolizes the fire of the Catholic faith that missionary disciples have providentially shared with our catechumens.

We celebrate the preparation of the paschal candle which is a constant symbol of the Resurrection and the Paschal Mystery in our sanctuaries. As I inserted five grains of incense into the candle in the form of a Cross, I said this prayer: “By his holy and glorious wounds, may Christ the Lord guard us and protect us.”

The holy and glorious wounds of the Risen Christ touch our spiritual, emotional and physical wounds so that we can be the Risen Christ’s instruments in helping to heal the wounds of the world. The holy and glorious wounds of the Risen Christ touch the wounds of those suffering now in Ukraine and in every war-torn area of the world.

Tonight we celebrate the beautiful connection between the Good Friday chant as the the Cross is raised three times “Behold the wood of the Cross, on which hung the salvation of the world” with the Easter Vigil chant as the Paschal candle is raised three times “The Light of Christ. Thanks be to God.” These parallel chants remind us to have great faith in the Paschal Mystery pattern that the Holy Spirit etches in us in the flowing water of the Sacrament of Baptism.

Tonight we rejoice in the chanting of the Easter Proclamation, the *Exsultet*, which connects our emotional faith memory with that of our ancestors in the faith. We hear in the *Exsultet* “Rejoice, let Mother Church also rejoice arrayed with the lightning of his glory, let this holy building shake with joy, filled with the mighty voices of the peoples.”

Together we marvel at the rich panorama of Easter Vigil readings that trace the arc of Salvation History and illustrate the power of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Pope Benedict XVI once said that the lives of our Catholic Saints are a beautiful light that streams from the biblical passages that they studied, prayed, contemplated, and heard proclaimed at our liturgies and lived heroically.

Every saint was formed in the biblical passages of the Easter Vigil we heard tonight. Every saint was forged in the Resurrection Appearances and Narratives that we will celebrate in the Easter Octave and throughout the Easter season.

During our Baptismal Liturgy, we will chant together a Litany of the Saints in which we will ask the great saints of the centuries to intercede for our catechumens who are to be baptized and to intercede for each of us and the mission of the Church at this unique moment of history.

Each one of us remembers tonight during this Litany that as we call on the Saints to help us that they in turn call on us to join them on the path of heroic holiness and mission.

Tonight, in the Blessing of Baptismal Water, we will hear these words: “O God, whose Son, baptized by John in the waters of the Jordan was anointed with the Holy Spirit, and, as he hung upon the Cross, gave forth water from his side along with blood, and after his Resurrection, commanded his disciples: ‘Go forth, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,’ look now, we pray, upon the face of your Church and graciously unseal for her the fountain of Baptism.”

The rich symbolism of the baptismal garment and the presentation of a lighted candle, the renewal of baptismal promises and the laying on of hands in the Sacrament of Confirmation with an emphasis on the gifts of the Holy Spirit – wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord – all of the interlinking dimensions of the signs and symbols of the the Easter Vigil Liturgy along with our eating and drinking of the Body and Blood of Christ emphasize our call together to be missionary disciples.

Dear Catechumens, as you receive the Sacraments of Initiation tonight – Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist -- you are making a bold and radical decision about every moment of the rest of your lives.

The logic of every moment of your preparation for the Easter Vigil and the experience of support you have received from your sponsors, our RCIA team and the parishioners of St. Agnes Cathedral is a radical fidelity.

Make no mistake tonight. You are making a radical commitment tonight to be completely faithful to the Body and Blood of Christ and to the Sunday Mass till the week you die.

You are making a commitment to be a missionary disciple in your family, in your parish, in your community, and in the World.

We rejoice with you tonight at this Easter Vigil and we pledge our support as you embrace the Light of the Risen Christ and the Light of his presence in the mission of the Catholic Church on earth.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the “fulcrum”<sup>6</sup> of salvation and world history. Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life and his Resurrection brings hope to the world.

Pope Benedict XVI states: “The resurrection of Jesus is an eruption of light. Death is conquered, the tomb is thrown open. The Risen One himself is Light, the Light of the world. With the resurrection, the Lord’s day enters the nights of history. Beginning with the resurrection, God’s light spreads throughout the world and throughout history.”<sup>7</sup>

That is what we celebrate at this Easter Vigil.

We pray that at this Easter Vigil 2023 the Risen Lord may open our eyes, hearts, minds and imaginations to his Easter power and to his Easter grace.

As we think of the archaeological restoration work in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem that will reinforce the foundation beneath Christ’s Tomb, we ask that the Holy Spirit will deepen the foundation of our lives at this Easter Vigil with the power, peace and joy of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

May the eruption of Christ’s Light from the Empty Tomb enlighten and illumine the world’s darkness. May the Risen Christ lead us to heroic and courageous holiness so that we can be instruments of His Peace to change the world.

---

<sup>6</sup> Pope St. John Paul II’s 1998 Apostolic Letter *Dies Domini*, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Pope Benedict’s *Easter Vigil Homily*, April 11, 2009

