

EASTER VIGIL HOMILY
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The Sacred Triduum is a continuous liturgy that inspires and fascinates us with its Catholic celebration of liturgical, theological and spiritual mysticism.

I was deeply moved by the Mass of the Lord's Supper homily of Fr. Alessandro Da Luz and the Good Friday Passion of the Lord homily of Msgr. William Koenig, the rector of St. Agnes Cathedral. I used both homilies for my mental prayer early Holy Saturday morning.

In his Mass of the Lord's Supper homily, Fr. Da Luz said: "Here at this altar and the altars of Catholic Churches throughout the world, Heaven and earth are joined, every time the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is offered. On our baldachino (here at St Agnes Cathedral), we see the angels and saints depicted reminding us how we profess in the Creed that God is Creator of all things 'visible and invisible.' It is not just us here at Mass; they are here praying with us and for us."

In his Good Friday Passion of the Lord homily, Msgr. Koenig reflected on how the world had changed since Ash Wednesday and reflected on the Resurrection lessons of a 7th grade girl who had died of cancer. Msgr. Koenig said: "I began this homily by observing how so much has changed around us since Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent. I end by asking very simply what has changed within me? Over four weeks ago, prior to the suspension of public Masses and many of the other measures that have been undertaken in recent weeks to flatten the curve, parishioners and friends gathered here at St. Agnes one Saturday afternoon for a Memorial Mass of a young, seventh grade parishioner named Mary who had died from cancer two years ago this past March. She was a remarkable young girl who loved people and life and was

unabashed about praying the rosary and looking with trust to God. At the time of the Mass, while gatherings were still being allowed, I was also very aware of the news reports that were indicating the potential severity of covid 19. And as I listened to the news about this virus, I began to sense ever more deeply how Mary must have felt as she faced the uncertainty and the ensuing cross of her own illness. I began to better understand how Mary must have felt in realizing that not everything was in her control, that the future was a mystery, that questions of why go seemingly unanswered. And in grasping more fully the ‘what’ that young Mary faced in those final years of her life, I looked to her as an example of the ‘how’ we can face the ‘what.’ And that ‘how’ was with simple child-like trust. Child-like trust comes from hearing Jesus proclaiming from the cross, ‘I thirst’ and knowing that Jesus was not speaking here of physical thirst but the thirst and desire that St. John tells us he had for the Samaritan woman’s faith and the desire he has to bring each of us into new life. Child-like trust comes from seeing the love Jesus has for each of us which impelled him to shed the very last drop of his blood for us.”

I am still praying and reflecting over the marvelous theological, spiritual and pastoral depth of this section of Msgr. Koenig’s homily. Thank you Fr. Da Luz and Msgr. Koenig.

And so we move rhythmically within the Sacred Triduum from the Mass of the Lord’s Supper to the Good Friday Passion of the Lord to tonight’s celebration of the Easter Vigil.

I have an Easter Vigil homily file that serves as almost a yearly diary of my prayer and encounter with the Risen Lord every Holy Week.

Each one of these homilies is different because they are prepared, researched, prayed and delivered against the back drop of what the Church and the World are experiencing at the time.

For instance, just last year, I focused on the tragic flames that engulfed Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris and how every dimension of the history of the Catholic faith in France is captured in the Rose Window and in the architectural and artistic detail in the building, and how it also reflects the

lives of every great French saint who walked and prayed in that great Cathedral.

I prayed to the Risen Christ that just as plans for the reconstruction and renewal of damaged parts of the Cathedral were beginning to emerge that a reconstruction, reform and renewal of both the Church in France and the Universal Church could happen and move forward gloriously.

In 2017, I focused on the recent renovations and archaeological breakthroughs concerning Christ's Tomb – what we call the “Aedicule” -- in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

I prayed to the Risen Christ that just as archaeologists and architects penetrated the historical layers of stone from different centuries that had been placed over the original stone on which the Lord's dead body had been reverently placed, and from which the bodily Resurrection took place, so too could the Risen Christ conduct an archaeology of our hearts liberating us from sin to receive His grace and be heroically holy and missionary.

What really caught my attention most though, was the Easter Vigil homily preached in 2018 in which I focused on a phrase from the Easter Vigil *Exsultet*.

Let me share it with you now:

“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.’ ‘Let this holy building shake with joy....Let this holy building shake with joy.’ Let this holy building of St. Agnes Cathedral shake with joy in such a way that the tremors are felt in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and the Tomb of Christ which has been recently restored.

Let this holy building of St. Agnes Cathedral shake with joy in such a way that the tremors are felt in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Let this holy building of St. Agnes shake with every parish in every part of the world and let every

Catholic parish on our beautiful Island shake with the joy of their Mother Church tonight.”

I find these words from 2018 both ironic and provocative as we celebrate a virtual Easter Vigil with very few people in this beautiful and vast Cathedral because of the COVID-19 virus.

How can our holy St. Agnes Cathedral and our beautiful parish churches on Long Island from Elmont to Montauk shake with the joy of the Risen Christ and in rhythm with all the other Basilicas, Cathedrals and parish churches around the world when so few can physically participate in Easter Mass?

What sort of Easter is it when most Catholics must stay at home and at best participate by watching a small computer or cable television screen?

The answer to those questions is both simple and deep. The Catholic Church that we love is one, holy, catholic and apostolic. The People of God and the Mystical Body of Christ walked with the Risen Christ through every Red Sea, every Calvary, every trauma, tragedy and world crisis in every decade and in every century since that first Easter when Mary of Magdala discovered the Empty Tomb.

Tonight, the Risen Christ shakes in a joyful silence through this holy building of St. Agnes Cathedral, our Mother Church, straight to each of those families, our beautiful domestic churches, watching this Easter Vigil from their homes. The Risen Christ is as present to you there as He is here.

The Risen Christ shakes in a joyful silence through this holy building of St. Agnes Cathedral straight to those of you who are lying in hospital and nursing home beds, and in a special way those of you who are struggling with COVID 19 in ICU units or are quarantined at home.

And he walks with all of you who are health-care providers, EMTs, first responders and others who are on the front lines of this crisis. In your heroic and merciful actions you provide a model of Christian missionary discipleship.

Tonight, we celebrate the rich symbolism and liturgical mysticism of the Easter Vigil. We celebrate the Paschal Mystery interplay of Darkness and Light, the preparation and Lighting of the Paschal Candle, the symbolism of ignited incense billowing toward Heaven, our beautiful *Exsultet* and our renewal of Baptismal promises.

We celebrate the rich panorama of Easter Vigil readings that trace the arc of Salvation History and illustrate that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is, in the words of St. John Paul II, the “fulcrum” of Salvation and World History.

We celebrate our catechumens, candidates and RCIA teams watching at home and we celebrate how our Basilicas, Cathedrals and parishes around the world shake together in the creative rhythm of non-stop Catholic global evangelization.

Every saint was formed and forged 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.

So tonight, let’s each of us individually and united as the People of God claim our path to heroic holiness.

Let’s celebrate and make “this holy building, every parish and every living room shake with contemplative joy” as we realize that Christ is risen and the world will never be the same.

