

EASTER VIGIL 2021

Homily of Bishop John Barres

St. Agnes Cathedral

April 3, 2021

Tonight, at this Easter Vigil Liturgy 2021, 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.

It 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 and candidates around the world.

It is a fresh fire that ignites the kerygmatic Catholic preaching that we heard from your rector Fr. Michael Duffy at the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday and Fr. Alessandro da Luz at the Passion of the Lord Good Friday Liturgy.

Fr. Duffy quoted St. (Padre) Pio who said: "It would be easier for the world to survive without the sun than to do without Holy Mass." The Mass of the Lord's Supper commemorates the Institution of the Eucharist and the Institution of the Priesthood and Fr. Duffy shared so eloquently – even more eloquently since you see him living it every day -- the Eucharistic joy he experiences as a Catholic priest.

On Good Friday, Fr. Da Luz celebrated our presence in "the Sacred Paschal Triduum, the Crown Jewel of Holy Mother Church's liturgical year." He cited the antiphon from Morning Prayer of Good Friday: "We worship your Cross, O Lord, and we praise and glorify your holy resurrection for the wood of the Cross has brought joy to the world."

Tonight we celebrated 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 wounds so that we can be the Risen Christ’s instruments in helping to heal the wounds of the Church and the world.

We remember in a special way at this Easter Vigil our Catholic Gospel of Life and Social Justice call to continue to touch the wounds of the Covid-19 Pandemic and the wounds of racism in our country and to be instruments of racial harmony and peace.

Tonight we celebrate the beautiful connection between the Good Friday chant as the Deacon raises the Cross three times “Behold the wood of the Cross, on which hung the salvation of the world” with the Easter Vigil chant as the Deacon raises the Paschal Candle 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.” “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 and the Tomb of Christ in Jerusalem.

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 Cathedral shake with joy in such a way that the tremors are felt in Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris which is currently being renovated and its Beautiful Rose Window.

Let this holy building of St. Agnes Cathedral shake with joy in such a way that the tremors are felt in this Year of St. Joseph before every statue, every stained glass window and every mosaic of St. Joseph in every Catholic Church in the world.

Let this holy building of St. Agnes Cathedral shake with joy in such a way that the tremors are felt in the home parishes in the countries of origin of our beautiful Hispanic families on Long Island -- El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, Colombia, Guatemala, Ecuador, Peru, Chile, Honduras, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Panama, Cuba, Costa Rica, Paraguay, Uruguay, Puerto Rico and Mexico.

Que este edificio sagrado de la Catedral de Santa Inés se estremezca de alegría de tal manera que sus temblores se sientan en las parroquias de origen, en sus respectivos países, de nuestras hermosas familias hispanas de Long Island - El Salvador, República Dominicana, Colombia, Guatemala, Ecuador, Perú, Chile, Honduras, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Panamá, Cuba, Costa Rica, Paraguay, Uruguay, Puerto Rico and México.

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.

Together we marvel at 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 Pope St. John Paul II, the “fulcrum” of World History.

Tonight we enter the Tomb of Christ with the Holy Women described in Mark 16. We see “the young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a white robe” and we hear him say: “Do not be amazed! You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has been raised; he is not here.”

In entering the Empty Tomb at this Easter Vigil, we confront our own tombs, our own mortality, our own graves, our own deaths in the Light of the Risen Christ.

I can still remember in the Summer of 1967 my parents taking our family to Nisky Hill Moravian Cemetery in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. It is a beautiful and scenic cemetery on a hill that looks out over Lehigh University and what remains of the Bethlehem Steel Stacks.

I was six years old at the time and my father showed me the gravestones of my grandparents Oliver (1877-1963) and Matilda Barres (1882-1957) and my great grandparents from Mengerschied, Hunsreuck in Prussia Jacob (1829-1886) and Maryann (1836-1910) Barres and other extended family members.

I have a vivid memory of this moment of confronting the reality of death and the reality that the people buried beneath these old and weathered gravestones were mysteriously connected to my parents, my sisters and brother, and to me.

It was truly an existential moment of wonder for a six year old boy who did not know at that time that he would one day return, as the Catholic Bishop of Allentown, Pennsylvania, to bury his parents – Oliver (1921-2012) in 2012 and Marjorie (1922-2014) in 2014 -- in that very same cemetery plot.

The Light of the Risen Lord illumines all our future graves, our tombs and our family cemetery plots.

What a difference to contemplate our own death in the Light of the Risen Christ and our firm and confident belief in Eternal Life.

As we enter the Empty Tomb, we ask the Risen Christ to roll away the stones that obstruct the flow of grace in the Church's mission.

For instance, consider our Holy Father Pope Francis' words in his Apostolic Exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel* (2013). He speaks about the "pastoral acedia" (82), the cynicism, disillusionment and lack of deep and true faith that can obstruct the Church's global mission. He writes: "A tomb psychology thus develops and slowly transforms Christians into mummies in a museum." (83)

We ask the Risen Lord to de-mummify our Catholic witness in the public square. We ask the Risen Lord to roll away the stones of sin, fear, anger, resentment, skepticism, doubt, resistance and rebellion from our hearts.

We ask the Holy Spirit to expel any dimension of a “Tomb Psychology” in the way we live.

We ask the Holy Spirit to take us from a “Tomb Psychology” to an “Empty Tomb Psychology” that trusts in the Victory of the Risen Christ.

Pope Francis’ recent Apostolic Journey to Iraq exemplifies the Risen Lord “Empty Tomb Psychology” which animates his spirit of global mission and universal fraternity. He brought joy and hope - he brought the Risen Christ - to the people of Iraq. May the Holy Father’s example in Baghdad, Ur, and Mosul inspire us to be bold evangelizers and fervent messengers of hope at this Easter Vigil!

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

Every saint lived in their particular moment of history an “Empty Tomb Psychology.”

Tonight, we celebrate the Easter Vigil in the Year of St. Joseph proclaimed by Pope Francis. St. Joseph is the Patron of the Universal Church, the Patron of Workers, the Just Man, the husband and the father serving and helping to lead the Holy Family. St. Joseph, at this Easter Vigil we ask your intercession for the Church tonight. Together, we *Go to Joseph!*

We celebrate this Easter Vigil still rejoicing in the recent October 10, 2020 Beatification in Assisi of Blessed Carlo Acutis (1991-2006) who calls the young people of the world to avoid being bland photocopies and to embrace their unique baptismal call and path to holiness.

We celebrate this Easter Vigil still rejoicing in the October 31, 2020 Beatification of Fr. Michael McGivney (1852-1890), the founder of the Knights of Columbus and an icon of all the holy American priests who have helped build our Church and our country.

We celebrate this Easter Vigil knowing that we will celebrate on May 20, 2021 the 500th Anniversary of St. Ignatius of Loyola's (1491-1556) conversion after he was wounded at the Battle of Pamplona.

This Anniversary begins an Ignatian Year celebrating the Jesuit charism in the history of the Church and the World. How appropriate at a moment in Church history when our Holy Father Pope Francis is a son of St. Ignatius and St. Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises.

So tonight at this Easter Vigil, let's celebrate and make this holy building and the entire world shake with the joy of the Risen Christ, the joy of the saints and the joy of the global mission of mercy of His Church!