



Homily for 4/11/2020

Easter Vigil

Rev. J. David Carter, JCL

Happy Easter!
Feliz Pascua!

We say Easter, which derives from the Old English word for spring. It has pagan connotations and has no immediate meaning to us as a people of faith, except by way of association, that spring is the time when Christians celebrate Jesus' Resurrection. To many it simply means springtime, bunny rabbits and chocolate eggs. I have spoken of this problem before. Etymologically, Easter is a reference to the pagan goddess *Eostre* worshiped by the ancient Germanic people as the goddess of springtime. I think we can do so much better than "Happy Easter". In the past I have suggested that one option is to follow our Eastern brothers and sisters in using the greeting, "Christ is Risen!" and answering, "He is Risen indeed!" This is still something preferable to simply, and meaninglessly, saying Happy Easter. However, in Latin we as Roman Catholics call this celebration *Pascha*. In fact, every other language that I know of uses a derivative of this, such as the Spanish I just mentioned, *Feliz Pascua*. That word '*Pascha*' is itself a derivative of the Hebrew word *pesach*, which means Passover. We call the whole mystery of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, the Paschal Mysteries, that is, the "Passover Mysteries." For all the good points that our English language has, this is one where it lets us down with the pagan "Easter". Thanks be to God that we as Catholic Christians are not locked into just one culture or language. As people that come from every race culture and nation, we realize that we are part of something far greater. That is what the Latin language does for us as Roman Catholics, that is, those who have received the faith through the noble tradition of the Latin Rite of Catholicism. It challenges us to break out of our comfort zone to experience the mystery of belonging to something bigger than our own neighborhood and family. It also reminds us of our connection with the Sacred Tradition of the faith that stretches back through the centuries to the Apostles themselves. Our received faith is so dependent on the precision of this ancient language, and it has been a safeguard against error, a safeguard we have all too readily jettisoned in recent years. It also unites us together in a common patrimony of lived faith that makes for true culture. In the West we have been shaped and, more importantly, unified by the Latin language. That is the reason why this Mass tonight at the Basilica, though we have English speakers and Spanish speakers tuning in, will enjoy a moment of unity in our common heritage when the Canon of the Mass and the Our Father are prayed in Latin. We can also see in it a connection to the Pope in Rome whose mass was prayed in the Latin Language. This is meant not as a stumbling block, but as a way to unify us. By learning and praying the Our Father in Latin we can be unified with our Spanish speaking neighbors in the parish as well as the Pope in Rome. I encourage you to enter into this mystery knowing that we are praising God with one voice like at Pentecost, instead of with confusion like at Babel. I urge you to make use of the resources we have put out on our Facebook page and our website to be able to join in this one voice of praise. This is the Catholic ideal.

Now, back to what we call this day and season, let's learn a lesson from our Roman Catholic heritage. I would prefer that instead of saying "Happy Easter", you rather say, "Happy Passover", and then you can respond, "Jesus is our Passover Lamb!" If we did this, every Christian would immediately know and understand what this season means.

The central figure in the Passover that we read about in the Book of Exodus is the lamb. The lamb is to be slaughtered. The blood is to be put on the doorpost of believers. The meat is to be eaten. Do this and you will live, at least through that night in Egypt. This salvation from earthly captivity was what the Jewish people were commanded to commemorate in the Passover every year. By their yearly sacrifice, they would relive that moment of God's majestic glory coming to save them from slavery and lead them to the promised land.



In Jesus Christ, God in the flesh chose to take this very festival as the paradigm for His own more glorious and more majestic salvation of the whole human race. “While he was at supper,” the Scriptures say. This was not just any supper; it was the Passover meal. Note how the traditional unleavened bread was there: “he took bread and gave it to them.” There was the bread, but where was the lamb? Jesus Himself is the lamb: “this is my body.” John the Baptist had pointed this out – “Behold the Lamb of God”. Jesus’ sacrifice began at the Passover meal, but it did not end there. There were traditionally four cups of wine drunk during the course of this meal. Jesus did not drink the last cup of ceremonial wine at the meal saying instead, “I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s Kingdom.” (Matt 26:29). He drank that cup on the cross when he said, “I thirst,” and they gave Him wine mixed with gall to drink. “When he had drunk of it, he said, ‘It is finished’”. What is finished? The paschal banquet. The sacrifice of the lamb, the redemption of the world from slavery, the reign of sin and death – that is what He finished on the cross. What began then? The Reign of God our Father, the Kingdom of God. God died in the flesh as the sacrificial lamb who accomplished our redemption, our salvation. His death on the cross destroyed death for those who partake of His body and blood. Just as the blood on the doorposts of the Israelites in Egypt saved them from temporal death, those whose bodies are anointed with the blood of this lamb are saved from eternal death. Just as God had commanded the Israelites to eat the flesh of the lamb, those who eat His flesh and drink His blood will live forever.

So Christ is our Passover lamb. Christ our Pasch has been slain, Alleluia. But unlike the Passover lamb of the old testament, in this marvelous sacrifice, the victim immolated on the cross and buried among the dead, rose again on the third day! In the Book of Revelation, John saw standing in the midst of the throne of Heaven a Lamb who seemed to have been slain. To this sacrificed but living lamb was given the worship of incense and the hymn of praise was sung. “Worthy are you to receive the scroll and to break open its seals, for you were slain and with your blood you purchased for God those from every tribe and tongue, people and nation. You made them a kingdom and priests for our God, and they will reign on earth.” “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches, wisdom and strength, honor and glory and blessing.”

My friends, John’s vision in the Book of Revelation is the image of what we are doing here. Every time we offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass we participate in this heavenly liturgy, the Lamb’s Banquet. But this heavenly liturgy is not just for the Saints who have gone before us, the elders in faith, nor is it just for the countless host of angels. It is for us also, here below. John says to us, “Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, everything in the universe, cry out: “To the one who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor, glory and might, forever and ever.”

During this time of isolation when a disease of the body has kept us apart, we realize the work of the devil trying to keep us apart. In the sorrow and angst of being away from our Paschal Banquet in our physical separation, we are tempted to let our souls be gloomy and cast down. But I say to you, do not be afraid. “Hope in God! I will praise Him still, my savior and my God!” (Psalm 42) His sacrifice is eternal, and His sacrifice is accessible to us in Spirit. The Lord is not far from those who long for Him. There is great power in Spiritual Communion with our Lord, even if it is not what we want. We still have access to His salvation by our worship in Spirit and in Truth. We still can sing His praises like in the Book of Revelation. Just as I mentioned that we are united in one voice at the Our Father through Latin, so to we are united even in our diversity of location. The Paschal Candle has been lit. Wherever you are and in whatever way you can, I urge you to light the candle of faith in your heart and in your homes. Announce what God has done for humanity by the light glowing from your innermost being and casting its rays to those you live with, those you work with and those you are able to encounter, even if you have to keep six feet apart! Announce the Passover of the Lord! Do not be afraid to say it aloud at the proper time of the Mass, When the priest says “Behold the Lamb of God” proclaim with full voices in your own language, “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed!” Sing the praises of



the Lamb who was slain. Sing Alleluia, that is, great praise to the Lord. Even in the recesses of your homes, let His praise be heard. Worthy is the Lamb.

May Jesus Christ be praised, Alleluia, Alleluia!
Now and forever, Alleluia, Alleluia!