

FROM FR. ALIMAJI'S DESK

Reflections on Easter (Easter Vigil)

Easter Vigil Mass: This Easter night is the holiest of all nights, when Christ our Savior came back from the dead. Because of the importance and magnificence of this holy night, we and the whole world are welcoming Christ from the dead through and with several rituals, beginning with the Service of the Light, the Decoration of the Paschal Candle, the Procession in the Dark, the Singing of the *Exsultet* – also known as the Easter Proclamation, the Liturgy of the Word of no less than five Scripture passages of which three must be from the OT and two from the NT together with their psalms and prayers, the Baptismal Liturgy with the Litany of the Saints (if there are people for baptism or reception into the Catholic Church), the Blessing of Water, the Renewal of Baptismal Promises, and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. All these rituals make for a great colorful celebration at the Easter Vigil Mass. There is even added galore if there is great singing and musical accompaniments. Whichever way, the Easter Vigil Mass is always a worship grandeur. You would not want to miss this Vigil Mass, which is the climax of the Sacred Easter Triduum, after we have observed forty days of the Season of Lent and the Passion of the Lord. In all these we make to share in the Lord's new life. By his rising from the dead, Christ brings to us the light of his new life. **By his rising to new life, it becomes obvious that Christ is truly the author of life, the Lord of creation. His death is our death to sin, and his rising is our restoration to new life, restored to grace, to that life we lost by the sin of Adam and Eve. It is good to listen attentively to the words of the *Exsultet*.**

Easter: Easter is a call on us to find ways of persevering in overcoming sin and all forms of evil, the unrighteousness we face and the struggles both individually and collectively. We are to make conscious efforts to find new ways of living lives of holiness in the truth of our Christian faith. Only Christians have gotten this inheritance in the light of our salvation history in Christ. Question: Will other humans be saved? The answer is "Yes" on condition that they and each accept Christ as Lord and Savior, by professing their faith in him. Christ said in John 10:1 that He has other sheep that do not belong to this fold, they too he must save. Therefore, in the Acts of the Apostles, St. Peter said, there is no other name given upon this earth whereby people can be saved than the name Jesus, (cf. Acts 4:12). **JESUS is the name for salvation.** God gave us freedom and unconditional love and pardon through Christ Jesus. Hence the Lord did say, "I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10b) in reference to all humans as his sheep, though some are not yet in this sheepfold called Christianity. Humanity must accept Jesus Christ to be saved. **Jesus the good shepherd gives eternal life to his sheep for whom he laid down his life, that he may take it up again, (cf. John 10:18, and verse 27).** The resurrection of Christ this very Easter night is the taking up again of his life as he foretold.

Salvation History: It is very necessary, given the Scripture readings at this Mass, that we review our salvation history. From the Book of Genesis, chapter 1 and 2 and 3, we listened to the narratives of creation and the fall of man. God as Trinity - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - created all things and it was very good. "Then God said: 'Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness.'" (Gen. 1:26a). God gave humans great prominence among all that he created. The fall of man is the woeful narrative of man's insatiability. Yet, in this episode, God proved that he is God. He quickly made the plan for human salvation. Addressing the serpent, God said: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will strike at your head, while you strike at his heel." (Gen. 3:15). Here we read the prominent position of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. God promised us a Savior, the Messiah, as a result of our sinfulness. Hence the Prophet Isaiah in chapter 7:14b wrote, "The virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel." Reading further on the divinity of Christ in the OT, Isaiah in chapter 9, verses 5 and 6 wrote of the dominion of the child-Christ, as God-Hero, Prince of Peace, etc. etc. In Luke's Gospel, chapter 1: 26-38, the Angel Gabriel gave us the annunciation of the child-Christ. **The birth of the Lord Jesus in Bethlehem became the fulfilment of God's promise of the Messiah – Immanuel – God with us in human form. His birth signals the beginning of our redemption. It took another thirty-three years for our redemption to be realized, when Christ died on Good Friday, and made an expiation for our sins. Only then was our salvation complete.** History was made in Jerusalem that the One who went about doing good was crucified for no wrong, no crime committed. "Look, I am bringing him out to you, so that you may know that I find no guilt in him." (John 19:4). So said the Governor, Pontus Pilate. The charges were, among other things, that "he made himself the Son of God." (John 19:7). Believers know he is the Son of God.

The Resurrection of Christ is the judgement to the world. While we celebrate the night of his rising from the dead, let us face the challenge of dying to our old selves that we may rise to righteousness, to new life in Christ, and to becoming children of the resurrection. It demands a radical change of life, a change of heart = *metanoia*, a personal determination to leave our old lives behind and become new persons for Christ, a new creation; and becoming new evangelizers who must join Mary Magdalene and the other women and the apostles to proclaim this message of salvation to the world as the new ambassadors for Christ, announcing the good news to the world that they are reconciled with God. (cf. 2 Cor. 5:15-21). May the new life in Christ permeate our lives into truly becoming the new creation! Amen