



**Most Rev. Robert D. Gruss  
Bishop of Rapid City**

**Easter Vigil Homily**  
Our Lady of Perpetual Help Cathedral

March 30, 2013

Good evening everyone! Welcome to all of you, especially the catechumens, the candidates for full communion into the Church, all of your families, and my dear friends in Christ. Indeed what a joy that we gather tonight in keeping vigil for the Lord.

Once again, what is revealed tonight is the mystery of our redemption – the “necessary sin of Adam, destroyed completely by the Death of Christ... and earned so glorious a Redeemer.” This sacred mystery cannot be comprehended by our minds, but its power draws us into **one never-ending prayer**, *"Lord, deepen our faith so that we may know, and see, and experience its power now and forever."*

The power of this holy night is a bold proclamation of Christ’s victory over sin and death. The power of this holy night is our sharing in the gift of redemption and salvation. As I said last night, our lives are greatly diminished apart from the cross of Jesus Christ. And the cross of Jesus Christ has little value for us without the Resurrection. In God giving away His Son, God’s only and deepest desire was and is to have a relationship with those whom He has called His own – each and every one of us.

For you catechumens and candidates, tonight your life changes forever, if you allow Jesus to draw you into this mystery of salvation – if you say “yes” to this love, if you say “yes” to this love relationship with Jesus Christ. Your life will never be the same.

In the Liturgy of the Word this evening, we were lead on a journey through our salvation history, seeing through the eyes of faith, the love which God cared for his people, beginning with the story of creation. We heard how God rescued His people from the slavery of Pharaoh; and how God made an everlasting covenant with his people, and even after they had wandered away, God claimed them once more as His own. We see ourselves in these stories. We too, share this experience of our ancestors, each in our own way. Their stories are our stories.

This liturgy tonight is filled with symbolism. One great symbol of this evening is the Paschal Candle. We began this celebration standing in the darkness. We came into this dark church carrying the Paschal Candle – the Light of Christ – lit from the blessed Easter fire. This Light of Christ was shared from hand to hand, from person to person, so that the darkness is filled with light. The emptiness of the world's sin is now filled with the light of Christ's sacrifice through His death and His rising. This light is for our eyes and cannot be quenched.

Think about this holy light representing Christ Himself. Pope Benedict shared this reflection:

*This is a light that lives from sacrifice. The candle shines inasmuch as it is burnt up. It gives light, inasmuch as it gives itself. Thus the Church presents most beautifully the paschal mystery of Christ, who gives himself and so bestows the great light. Secondly, we should remember that the light of the candle is a fire. Fire is the power that shapes the world, the force of transformation. And fire gives warmth. Here too the mystery of Christ is made newly visible. Christ, the light, is fire, flame, burning up evil and so reshaping both the world and ourselves.* [Easter Vigil Homily of Pope Benedict XVI, Saint Peter's Basilica, 7 April 2012]

The heart of Jesus, like a candle, was made visible as He was consumed by love for us on the cross, as He gave of himself so completely. This love, His love, has reshaped the world, has transformed creation, reducing evil and sin to rubble for us who believe, allowing us to be absorbed by this love.

Another rich symbol tonight is water. We heard of how the Israelites escaped death through the waters of the Red Sea. We heard how “*All you who are thirsty*” are invited to “*come to the water.*” [Is 55:1] The Prophet Ezekiel spoke of the Lord saying, “*I will sprinkle clean water upon you to cleanse you from all your impurities, and from your idols I will cleanse you.*” [Ex 36:26]

All of these passages are references to baptism – to the cleansing waters of baptism – the cleansing waters that bring new life, but only after we have chosen to die with Jesus and enter the tomb with him. St. Paul shares with us, “***We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life.***” [Rom 6:4]

This dying to self must happen daily so that this newness can be experienced daily. In this way, we too fulfill this covenant.

As I mentioned in my homily at the Rite of Election, what you have accepted an invitation into catechumens and candidates, is not membership into the Catholic Church. Religion for many people remains a “private affair”; or people identify themselves as members of a church, rather than servants of Christ’s mission. Because God has entered into a covenant with each one of us for all eternity, we are baptized for a mission and not for membership.

The Sacraments of Initiation which you will receive in a few minutes are not only your entry into the very “holiness of God”, they are not only your entry into the sacramental life of the Catholic Church, but they **commission** you for service, to live out the mission of Jesus Christ in the world today... amidst all the temptations that are out there. This is a great challenge for all of us. In fact, there is no greater challenge today as the culture tries to remove Jesus from it altogether.

The Christian life and the demands that flow from the sacraments cannot be taken lightly. You are accepting not a life of mediocrity and shallow religiosity, but a call to a life of intentional faith, hope, and love, empowered by the Holy Spirit, so that you can give your life away as Jesus did.

Jesus wants all of us to be candles – to be a light for the world being consumed through giving our lives away. Again, “*The candle shines inasmuch as it is burnt up. It gives light, inasmuch as it gives itself.*”

It is an important call, a big task, an exciting adventure, but one in which we never have to face alone. All we are required to do is surrender our lives to Christ each and every day, seeking His will, seeking His desire for us, seeking this personal relationship with Him. This is our call. This is our mission. Really, this is our true destiny.

Pope Francis, in his encouragement to the world on Palm Sunday, said this: *“Do not be men and women of sadness: a Christian can never be sad! Never give way to discouragement! Ours is not a joy that comes from having many possessions, but from having encountered a Person: Jesus, from knowing that with him we are never alone, even at difficult moments, even when our life’s journey comes up against problems and obstacles that seem insurmountable, and there are so many of them!”*

*We accompany, we follow Jesus, but above all we know that he accompanies us and carries us on his shoulders. This is our joy, this is the hope that we must bring to this world of ours. Let us bring the joy of the faith to everyone!”* [Homily of Pope Francis, Palm Sunday, March 24, 2013]

Christ has given us Himself in the sacramental life of the Church. His deep love comes alive in these Easter Sacraments. It comes alive, not just for the catechumens, but for all of us as we renew our baptismal covenant. As the candidates experience the power of the Holy Spirit through their Confirmation, that same Spirit stirs within our own hearts to strengthen us once again for Christ’s mission. We receive food for the journey as Jesus shares with us the bread of life and the cup of the new and everlasting covenant.

My dear friends, tonight we are truly blessed. We weren’t there on that first Easter morning, peering into the empty tomb and seeing signs of the resurrection. But we are here now, alive and living out this faith that “Jesus Christ is risen.” We are here as the beneficiaries of the life and love that emerges from his death.

We come together in faith because we know the story isn’t nonsense. We come here because we too, are in amazement, in amazement and in gratitude for what God has given us in Christ’s victory over sin and death. It is indeed by His mercy and His care for us that we are able to walk through this life courageously and faith-fully, and into the next one with certainty.

GOD BLESS YOU ALL AND HAPPY EASTER! ☩