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Bishop of Rapid City**

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

April 19, 2014

Good evening everyone! Welcome to all of you. A special welcome the catechumens and the candidates for full communion into the Catholic Church. It is a very special and important night for you. I am overjoyed for you! We welcome all of your families as well. But welcome to all of you, my dear friends in Christ. Indeed what a joy that we gather tonight in keeping vigil for the Lord.

We return tonight to this “School of Love” as we come to the conclusion of these three holy days, where we have walked with Jesus on the path of salvation. We have just heard the stories of those who have gone before us in faith; hearing once again of God’s deep love for his people and his creation, a love rejected over and over again. The darkness of peoples’ hearts seeps in sin, rejecting this love. But God did not give up on his own. In spite of ourselves, he has called us back to him.

The Prophets Isaiah, Baruch, and Ezekiel are the voices of the Lord calling God’s people back into relationship, not just thousands of years ago, but even today. These prophets and others were very clear of the desire of God’s heart. *“Come to me heedfully; listen, that you may have life. I will renew with you the everlasting covenant...”* *“With enduring love I take pity on you, says the Lord, your redeemer.”* *“I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you... I will be your God.”*

God continues to be loving and forgiving despite how we act, because it is who God is. God is love. A world seeped in darkness and sin, suffering and pain is contrary to the heart of God. These stories, in many ways, are our own stories – each of us wandering away in our sin and darkness, and God calling us back.

Raymond Brown, one of our great scripture scholars once wrote, **“Darkness will last until someone believes in the risen Jesus.”** So God lit a fire, and the whole Church burst forth into light. This Risen Jesus is that fire!

His resurrection set the whole world aflame with a new love. Redemption in its completeness flows forth from his resurrected life.

God’s final and definitive answer to every imaginable fear and sin, to every imaginable pain and suffering that any human being could have, including the pain of death, has been proclaimed in the resurrection of his Son. This Easter light shining brightly proclaims this truth and is inviting us to live it so that it remains a living reality. The ceremony of light which we experienced at the beginning of this liturgy should never stop when our own candles have been lit. We are called to always turn to someone around us whose candle is cold and dark, and we light it with the flame of our candle, the light of Christ in our hearts. **“Darkness will last until someone believes in the risen Jesus.”** We are those examples of faith for others. We are that light of the Risen Jesus.

From the pierced side of Christ, a gusher of grace, a fountain of mercy flows, bringing forth redeemed life for the Church. As the blood and water flowed from his pierced side on the cross, the birth of the sacramental life of the Church began – in particular the waters of Baptism and the blood of the Eucharist.

*“Sacraments are ‘powers that comes forth’ from the Body of Christ, which is ever-living and life-giving. They are actions of the Holy Spirit at work in his Body, the Church. They are ‘the masterworks of God’ in the new and everlasting covenant” [CCC #1116] given to sanctify us, to build up the Body of Christ, and to give glory to God.*

Initiation into the Catholic faith is an important part of this liturgy tonight. On Holy Thursday, as Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, he symbolically put them through a sort of initiation rite as he washed their feet and told them that they must do the same.

The references to Baptism in the readings tonight are many. We heard of how the Israelites escaped death through the waters of the Red Sea. We heard in Isaiah, *“All you who are thirsty, 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]

As you can see, these passages refer to Baptism – to the cleansing waters that bring new life. And 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] Those who have come tonight for Baptism are saying “Yes” in entering the tomb with Jesus. By your “yes”, you have chosen to die with Jesus and enter the tomb with him so that you *“might live in newness of life.”* You become a new creation and are brought into the very love of God in Christ Jesus.

For those of us who are already baptized, we re-enter these sacred waters in a spiritual way, choosing to die with Christ again, by rejecting Satan and sin, not only tonight, but again and again, each day of our lives, so that each day we might live a new life in him.

In the Sacrament of Confirmation, you will become “more bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit.” The gifts of the Spirit which you will receive, if active in your life, will assist you in becoming mature disciples, giving you strength to spread and defend the faith by word and deed – by your very life.

For those of us who are already confirmed, we recommit ourselves to entering into the New Evangelization, whereby we accept once again Christ’s mission given to us in our Confirmation.

The Holy Eucharist, the gift of Christ himself, is our food for nourishment in taking up Christ’s mission that has been given to us in Confirmation. It is not some magical moment, though for those of you who will be receiving the Eucharist for the first time, you might see it as a magical moment in your life tonight. The Eucharist is an encounter with Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord. He gives himself to us in this way so that we might be transformed into him and become his living presence in the world.

As Pope Francis said, *“The Eucharist is the sacrament of the communion that takes us out of our individualism so that together we live our discipleship, our faith in him.”*

*“Jesus speaks in the silence of the mystery of the Eucharist and reminds us each time that*

*following him means going out of ourselves and making our lives not something we 'possess,' but a gift to him and to others."*

My dear friends, tonight we are really blessed. We rejoice that God decided to become one of us, and as one of us, to walk with us through his Son Jesus, still today.

God has kindled a new fire within us, the fire of his Only Begotten Son. God has spoken from the darkness, and has passed on his Light, from its fiery origins in the passion and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, to each one us.

May our faith in the Risen Jesus, enable us to be living signs to our world that Christ, indeed, has conquered sin and death, so that others may come to know the power of his Resurrection.

**MAY GOD BLESS YOU ALL AND HAPPY EASTER! ✠**