



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

EASTER VIGIL HOMILY

Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help

April 7, 2012

I can't think of a better place to be this Saturday night! It is good that we are here. As we come to the conclusion of these three holy days, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome all of you to this celebration of our redemption. In a special way, I welcome the catechumens and candidates, their sponsors, their families, and all the guests that are here tonight. It is a very special and important night for you. So it is good that we are here!

We began this celebration, standing in darkness.....and then carrying this Easter fire into the darkness of our church, the home of our souls, and sharing Christ's light from hand to hand, so that the darkness is filled with His light, so that the emptiness of the world's sin is now filled with the light of Christ's sacrifice - His death and now His rising - a light for our eyes that will not be quenched, as Scripture says.

What is revealed tonight once again is the mystery of our redemption – the “necessary sin of Adam, destroyed completely by the Death of Christ!” – a mystery that cannot be comprehended by our minds, but whose power is to draw us into one never-ending prayer, *“Lord, deepen our faith so that we may know.”*

Through His Sacred Scriptures that we have heard tonight, the heart of God is revealed – the Lord's radical love. In the story of creation, God saw that everything that He made was good. We heard of the ways in which the Hebrew people were freed from the bondage of Pharaoh.....an image of the way God has freed you and me from sin and death. The Lord's radical love!

The Prophets Isaiah, Baruch, and Ezekiel proclaimed God's forgiveness, extending to us an invitation to enter in an intimate relationship with God. The prophets make it very clear that God is radically and outrageously in love with us. We may not have deserved such a lover, but for the sake of God's name He must share His love with His people. God continues to be loving and forgiving despite how we act, because God can't help it.

And God's ultimate act of love for us came in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus has shown us by His life and His word that God loves us in spite of ourselves. The giving of His Son in death is the God's greatest accomplishment; it is God's greatest display of His radical love for us. And the raising of His Son was not only a display of God's love for His Son, but God's final and definitive answer to every imaginable fear, and pain, and suffering that any human being could have, including the fear and pain of death.

So tonight we proclaim loudly a God of life, whose radical *“love cannot be pierced, shattered, or destroyed by even the most grotesque and obscene forms of evil and darkness....we call crucifixion. There is no one or nothing beyond the embrace of God’s pure love. Not even death can prevail.”*

We stand before God tonight, looking at the Resurrection, not as something that happened 2000+ years ago, but as a truth, better yet, as an experience that continues to bring power and grace to our lives and to our world. That in spite of the evil and sin that still pervades in our world, in spite of appearances of the triumph of evil in so many parts of the world, we will stand strong in the resurrected life of Jesus, knowing through faith that God’s radical love will have the last word.

The Resurrection is woven into the fabric of all these stories of scripture. And through our eyes of faith, we can see and believe it. These stories reveal who we are as the People of God... what God has done for us... what God is doing for us, and what God will continue to do for us... because of the suffering, death and resurrection of His Son.

We renew this relationship tonight in a special way. Like the Israelite people, we, as well as the catechumens and candidates among us, have wandered through the desert these last 40 days, and have found ourselves discovering a God who has offered us a new way of living. Tonight, we cast aside our covenant with death and embrace the new covenant of life that Jesus offers us.

Tonight, God is revealing to us His powerful love in our very midst through the catechumens and candidates who will be fully initiated into Christ’s Body. They are Easter icons. An icon is an image of something sacred. And if contemplated, it will lead us into a deeper mystery. These Easter icons depict a beautiful masterpiece of what Christ has given to us, of what Christ has given to all Christians. These Easter icons bring to life for us what this Easter vigil is all about....a message of salvation; actually an experience of salvation.

It is about being buried with Christ; it is about entering the tomb and dying with Jesus, so that we can rise with Him to live a new life. As St. Paul says, *“Through baptism into his death we were buried with him, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life.”* Through Baptism, God has made a claim on each one of us for all eternity.

For those of us who are already baptized, we can enter into the waters of Baptism in a spiritual way and choose 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.

These Easter icons will be anointed and sealed with gifts of the Holy Spirit, recognizing their call to proclaim *“Christ is risen!”*, accepting their responsibility to tirelessly labor so that the Christ’s love may more and more be manifested in a world which rejects Him.

And then these women, men, and children will participate in the priestly prayer of the whole baptized community, leading them to the table of the Lord. Together with this community that mentored them and prayed for them, these newly initiated men women, and children will feast with us at the table of the Eucharist, being nourished with Jesus’ greatest gift, the gift of Himself – His life giving, life-saving Body and Blood.

And finally, all of us will be sent out by Jesus in the same way as Mary Magdalene, Mary, and Salome. *“Go and tell the disciples and Peter of this good news.” “Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.”* In other words, we are sent into the world to be the “One” whom we have received. Be the “One” whom we have received.

Tonight we have been truly blessed indeed! Our covenant with the Lord comes alive in this celebration and in these Easter Sacraments. Tonight our Risen Savior shines upon us as He has loved us totally and completely.

My dear friends, “There is no greater love!”