

Easter Vigil
The Resurrection—Baptism, Confirmation, and Lord's Supper

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

"I know that my Redeemer lives," Job said. (Job 19:25a) On a night like this, it might be a bit strange to say something like that. The church has just celebrated Maundy Thursday, where Jesus celebrated His Last Supper, instituting the Sacrament of the Altar. The church has just memorialized Good Friday, where Jesus finished the work of salvation by his substitutionary death on the cross. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea had petitioned to take the body down from the cross and bury it; they had to be quick because the Sabbath was quickly approaching.

With the permission they sought, they laid the body of Jesus to rest. The Son of Man spent the most holy of Sabbaths resting in the grave.

"I know that my Redeemer lives." It's not so strange in this day and age, however. The church lives in the post-ascension age. Christ has died, Christ is risen, and Christ is ascended to the right hand of the throne of God. Christ will come again. So, sitting there now, having come through Holy Week, to this most holy night, it might not be on the tip of your tongue to proclaim the resurrection, but it has happened.

It is your hope, and this night is all about that hope. This is the first opportunity to celebrate that Christ is risen; hallelujah! It is an acknowledgment of what the church looks forward to—of what you look forward to. For when Christ comes again, the dead will rise in a resurrection like His.

Therefore, on this most holy of nights, the church historically has celebrated Holy Baptism. Catechumens who received instruction before being baptized, like the Ethiopian Eunuch (cf. Acts 8:26-40), were baptized this night. Imagine that, if you would, a service at which dozens, if not hundreds, of people were baptized and added to the church.

What is done today is a remembrance of baptism—of your baptism. Throughout Lent, the font was in the back of the church so that the first thing you saw upon entering was water to remind you that you are baptized. A note accompanied the font, reminding you of your dustiness—your fallen earthiness to which you will someday return—but also of the fact that you are bought with a price. Last night was a stark reminder of the price for your salvation. Finally, you were reminded that you are baptized—that Christ's death and resurrection are yours personally, given to you with the faith to believe it in that most blessed flood.

So, tonight, you recited the rite of Holy Baptism. No one was baptized tonight, but you were all reminded of the vows made in your stead (or perhaps you said them yourselves later in life) as you were brought to that font or one like it, drowned with all sin and evil desire, and a New Man emerged to live before God in righteousness and purity forever. You were asked the same questions that were asked the first time you visited the font. Do you renounce the devil and all his works and all his ways? Do you believe in God the Father Almighty? In Jesus Christ? In the Holy Ghost? You were told, once again, that the flood corresponds to baptism, that by water, the world was purged of sin, and that the righteous were saved by grace in the church of the ark.

You were reminded of your vows, mostly likely spoken for you. Have you lived up to them? Not in the slightest. You have said that you renounce the devil and his works and his ways, yet you still sin against your brother and against God. You know the Ten Commandments—in these you have been catechized and, hopefully, reminded of again and again. To a letter, not one of you has kept a single one of them. What was said of the Jews who had believe in Jesus can be said of you, "You are of your father the devil...he is a liar and the father of it." (cf. John 8:31, 44) Yes, dear hearers, you have spoken these things, but you have not kept to them—you have lied.

And you said them tonight, again, affirming your rejection of the devil, his works, and his ways. You were probably here last year, saying the same thing. Yet, as it has been in the days since last year's Vigil, so it will be again in the days following this year's Vigil. You speak with your mouth, but your actions betray you.

On top of that, tonight, you have heard further affirmation of baptismal vows as two young men confirmed the vows made for them at their baptisms, having been prepared for reception of the Lord's Supper. These are the same vows you have made. They acknowledge the gifts that God gave them in baptism—forgiveness, life, and salvation. They confessed the Scriptures to be the inspired Word of God. They confessed the Small Catechism to be faithful and true with regard to Scripture. They vowed to hear the Word of God and receive the Lord's Supper faithfully. They confessed an intention to remain faithful to the Triune God until death. They confessed—and this is the big one, right?—rather to suffer death than fall away from the faith that they have been taught and confessed.

How many who have been confirmed have kept to these vows? Not many. The joke—sad joke that it is—is that confirmation is often viewed as graduation, and that after being confirmed, you can be done with church until it is time to have your own children baptized and confirmed. Did they even hear the words that they said? But that's not the only thing. How many can confess to hearing the Word of God and receiving the Sacrament faithfully, week-in-and-week-out, since they have been confirmed? Other than illness or the call of one's vocation, have any of you done anything or been anywhere when you could otherwise have been here or a place just like this? So, as you heard the young men speak tonight, be reminded that you have said the same things in years past, and again, you have spoken with your mouths, but your actions betray you.

In fact, your actions proclaim the sinfulness of your flesh. They demonstrate the sin and trouble of this world. They confess the temptations of the devil.

However, there is that Lord's Supper. For what purpose did Jesus institute this Holy Sacrament of His very body and true blood? In his Lutheran Catechesis, Rev. Peter Bender wrote, "The Lord's Supper gives us Christ's body and blood as medicine against our sinful flesh, the sin and trouble of this world, and the temptations of the devil. This sacrament is given so that we might learn to believe that Christ, out of great love, died for our sin, and also learn from Him to love God and our neighbor."

Given your broken vows, you may want to ask, "Am I worthy to receive the Sacrament?" Well, who receives the Sacrament worthily? As I have tried to drive home with those young men, he who has faith in these words: "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." Do you believe those words? If yes, then you are worthy.

Revel in the present tense of that—you ARE worthy. It works in so many other ways, too. You ARE baptized. You ARE forgiven. You ARE faithful. Revel, also, in the passive voice, for these things are done to you, externally, outside from yourself, apart from any worth or merit in yourself. Therefore, you are MADE worthy by the grace and mercy of God, who has given you faith to believe those words, "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins."

Therefore, you see the table prepared. Jesus Christ, who has died, is risen and ascended, and is present among you with His grace to work in you His righteousness and forgiveness. Come to the feast, the feast is ready. Come, you who labor and are heavy laden, because here is your rest. Jesus rested in His tomb for a time, whom you know to be alive again, now bids you come and rest in Him who finished it all for you. Yes, your Redeemer lives, and He gives you that life in the Sacrament of His body and blood. Come, you redeemed of the Lord, this feast is for you, because you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.