



The Holy See

EASTER VIGIL HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II *Holy Saturday, 10 April 2004*

1. "This same night is a night of watching kept to the Lord . . . throughout every generation" (cf. *Ex* 12:42). On this holy night we celebrate the Easter Vigil, the first - indeed the "mother" - of all vigils of the liturgical year. On this night, as is sung over and over again in the *Preconio*, we walk once more the path of humanity from creation to the culminating event of salvation, the death and resurrection of Christ. The light of him who "has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 *Cor* 15:20) makes this memorable night, which is rightly considered the "heart" of the liturgical year, "bright as the day" (*Pss* 139:12). On this night the entire Church keeps watch and recalls, in meditation, the significant stages of God's saving intervention in the universe.

2. "A night of watching kept to the Lord". There is a twofold significance to this solemn Easter Vigil, so rich with symbols accompanied by an extraordinary abundance of biblical texts. On the one hand, it is the prayerful memory of the *mirabilia Dei*, in the re-presentation of key texts from the Sacred Scriptures, from creation to the sacrifice of Isaac, to the passage through the Red Sea, to the promise of the New Covenant. On the other hand, this evocative vigil is the trusting expectation of the complete fulfilment of the ancient promises. The memory of God's work reaches its climax in the resurrection of Christ and is projected onto the eschatological event of the *parusia*. We thus catch a glimpse, on this night of Passover, of the dawning of that day that never ends, the day of the Risen Christ, which inaugurates the new life, the "new heavens and a new earth" (2 *Pet* 3:13; cf. *Is* 65:17; 66:22; *Rev* 21:1).

3. From its very beginnings, the Christian community placed the celebration of Baptism within the context of the Easter Vigil. Here too, on this night, some catechumens will be immersed with Jesus into his death to rise with him to immortal life. Thus the wonder of the mysterious spiritual rebirth, wrought by the Holy Spirit, is renewed; the rebirth that incorporates the newly baptized into the people of the new and final Covenant, sealed by the death and resurrection of Christ. To each of you, dear Brothers and Sisters who will soon receive the sacraments of Christian initiation, I affectionately offer a special greeting. You come from Italy, Togo and Japan: your origins manifest the universality of the call to salvation and the gratuitousness of the gift of faith. Together with you I greet your relatives, friends and all who have seen to your preparation. Thanks to the sacrament of Baptism you will come to be a part of the Church, which is an immense people on pilgrimage, without limits of race, language or culture; a people called to the faith starting with Abraham, and destined to become a blessing in the midst of all the nations of the earth (cf. *Gen* 12:1-3). Be faithful to him who has chosen you, and to him entrust your entire lives with generous commitment.

4. Together with those who will shortly receive Baptism, the liturgy invites all of us here present to renew the promises of our own Baptism. The Lord asks us to renew the expression of our full obedience to him and of our total dedication to the service of his Gospel. Beloved Brothers and Sisters! If this mission may sometimes seem difficult, call to mind the words of the Risen Lord: "*I am with you always, to the close of the age*" (*Mt* 28:20). Certain of his presence, you shall fear no difficulty and no obstacle. His word will enlighten you; his Body and his Blood will nourish you and sustain you on your daily journey to eternity. At the side of each of you there will always be Mary, as she was present among the Apostles, frightened and

confused at the time of trial. And with her faith she will show you, beyond the night of the world, the glorious dawn of the resurrection. Amen. © Copyright 2004 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

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