

My friends in Christ, in the words of a very ancient homily, given by an unknown preacher, there is “something strange...happening.” There is, indeed, “a great silence on Earth today, a great silence and stillness” that has pervaded this whole day, even unto the night.... The King is dead.

That most evil regicide that we commemorated last night on Good Friday – the Veneration of the Cross – we acknowledged (and lamented) the death of the King; He “suffered death and was buried” some two thousand years ago, and as far as any of the Apostles were concerned (and as far as any of *us* would have figured were we there, too), the death of the King was the end of the story, the abrupt termination of a failed journey, the sudden collapse of what we would have hoped to be the promising foundation for something new, something great, but now...nothing.... The King is dead, and His death is the death *also* of many hopes and dreams, now gone.

And yet, this Easter Vigil liturgy actually has the audacity to tell us to *exult*? The deacon, at the start of tonight’s sacred mysteries, sang the Exsultet, which begins with a proclamation that the heavens exult, that the earth be glad, that Mother Church *also* rejoice – but how can we possibly be expected to exult and be glad and rejoice when the King is *dead* – when Jesus Christ suffered death and was buried – and *still* is buried for all that we would have known were we there too along with the Apostles! Exult? Be glad? Rejoice? You have *got* to be kidding me?

And yet once again, in the words of that ancient homily, “something strange is happening.”

The Apostles (and *we*, as well, were we there) might be left to weep and wonder, and all the while be tempted to despair at the death of the King...but what is God up to? His *Body*, sure, may be lying cold and still in the grim sleep of death...but what is the King *doing* while the heavens and the earth and newborn Mother Church are all near to bursting at the seams waiting to exult and be glad and rejoice? What is Christ doing? And what does the devil know *now* that, as *yet*, *we* do *not*?

Christ goes to summon the dead to new life. “Awake, O sleeper! Arise, O fallen one!” He goes with Cross in hand – His spear, His scepter, His battle banner. With Cross firmly in hand, He

goes on march to war (and with Satan did contend), bringing down the walls of the City of Dis (for the gates of hell shall *not* prevail), thus to rescue all those condemned to die: the Patriarchs and the Prophets, the men and women and children of virtue who held fast to the promise that Jesus came in the fullness of time to fulfill – those who held fast to the laws of God and nature and the moral virtues planted in our hearts from the very beginning.

What is the King doing while His Body lies in the sleep of death? And what does the devil know *now* that, as *yet*, we do *not*? Christ descended into the realm of the dead to bring utter collapse and ruin to Satan and hell, and the devil knows this, and the devil howls in agony and defeat, wrath and utter rage – seething all the while to get his revenge. For if his kingdom of death cannot crush the King and *His* Kingdom of light, love, joy, peace, and all good things, then make no mistake; let us be absolutely certain of *this*: the devil *will* do his darnedest to take as many of us down with him to his collapsed and ruined domain as he possibly can.

And Jesus *knows* that. Which is why He gave us His Bride, the Church – why we, who dare to claim the name of Christian, *are* the Church. It is why Christ admonishes us to pray and fast and give alms. It is why He shows us *how* to pray – both by word and example. It was why He gives us His Word – recorded and proclaimed in Sacred Scripture – and it is why He also gives us the seven Sacraments. He has given us *many* tools for our work and mission of participating in *His* work and mission – *many* weapons for our arsenal in our own lifelong fight against temptation and sin, Satan and death; and as we heard proclaimed many times when the deacon sang the Exsultet, “this is the night...O truly blessed night...Your night of grace, O holy Father.”

And “the sanctifying power of this night” empowers us now to exult and be glad and rejoice in the Light of Christ, gleaming in the dark atop our Paschal Candle. This is the night, inviting us to be mindful of (and grateful for) what the Lord has already done for nearly all of us – cleansing us of Original Sin, marking us as children of God, initiating us as members of the Mystical Body of Christ

which is the Church, all of which was what happened when we were baptized. This is the night that will give witness to all of that happening for the newest member of our Catholic Christian faith who is soon to be baptized. This is the night when our elect are given the Sacrament of Confirmation, a Sacrament which *confirms* us – *strengthens* us – in our ongoing struggle against evil, arming us with the fullness of the Holy Spirit and the manifold gifts of grace that the Spirit brings.

This is the night when all of us renew the vows of our own Baptism, having professed anew our faith in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, calling upon the intercession of Mother Mary, Saint Peter, and *all* saints, turning toward one another to ask their prayers for us as in turn we pray for them.

Because we are all in this together. This fight against evil, this struggle against sin and Satan: *ours* the fight, *ours* the struggle, and *ours* the victory in Christ Jesus our Lord. Yes, Jesus is indeed *my* personal Lord and Savior...*and* He is *our* Lord and Savior. And this *is* the night, dear friends, when, once more, we pledge ourselves anew totally to *Him* and to Him *alone*. In the Word proclaimed and in the Sacrament offered on the altar, the Lord gives of Himself to us, asking us in return to give of ourselves to Him – and so, we do.

This is the night, then, when we *do* exult, when we *do* be glad and rejoice, for the King is *not* dead but is alive – *not* buried but risen. And so, may it be that always and everywhere, from *this* day unto our *last* day, we would hold fast only to Jesus Christ, the risen Lord, He Who is our Light, our Savior, our Redeemer, our Lord and our God...that at the end of days when the King comes again in glory to judge the living and the dead, we would all of us together be counted amongst the *living* and *not* among the dead and thus be welcomed and received forever into halls of heavenly realms.