

Great VIGIL OF RESURRECTION

Saturday, 3 April 2021



'Why is this night so different?' The Great Vigil of Easter brings the faithful together in great joy to celebrate the Resurrection of the Lord, who in breaking the bonds of sin and death sets us free. Now God's People, as promised, can come into their inheritance as the 'adopted children' and 'heirs of Christ.'

'By an apostolic tradition which took its origin from the very day of Christ's resurrection, the Church celebrates the Paschal mystery every eighth day; with good reason this, then, bears the name of the Lord's Day... for on this day Christ's faithful should come together into one place so that by hearing the word of God, and taking part in the Eucharist, they may call to mind the passion, the resurrection, and the glorification of the Lord Jesus.'

(Constitution on Sacred Liturgy – Second Council of Vatican)

Keynote: Triumph and victory

Outline – Service of Light: Blessing of the Fire, the Easter Proclamation (*Exsultet*) Rejoice, heavenly powers! With multiple texts and songs drawn from the scriptures the liturgy opens with the blessing of the new fire symbolising the new dawn of re-creation and renewal.

Service of Light and blessing of the new fire

The blessing of the new fire and the lighting of the Paschal Candle outside the church is a ritual reminder of the coming to life of the dead Christ, the risen Lord banishing darkness and conquering sin and death. The procession of the faithful into the darkened Cathedral, bearing their lighted candles brings hope and joy to the remotest tomb, the darkest and loneliest place. The lighting of the house lights as evening descended on the Jewish Sabbath may be the origin and the basis for this Easter custom, or possibly the ritual of the bridesmaids carrying their lighted lamps to escort the coming of the bridegroom.

Easter Proclamation – 'Exultet' Rejoice, heavenly powers...!

A great hymn is then sung in praise of the Paschal Candle that represents the person of the risen Christ among his people again. The acclamations praise 'God' author of light and the giver of life and salvation.

Liturgy of the Word

A wide selection of readings is offered to suit the needs of the particular celebration. With responsorial psalms, silence, and prayers interspersed.

[1] Book of Genesis 1:1-2:2 (optional Genesis 1: 1, 26-31)

'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth... God said, "Let there be light", and there was light... Evening came and morning came: the first day.' The majestic progress of creation: *'Let there be a vault in the heavens... Let the earth produce vegetation... Let there be lights... and let them indicate festivals... and so God created great sea serpents and every kind of living thing... evening came and morning came...'* as each day marked the passage of time. Then *'God created man in the image of himself... make and female he created them... and God saw all he had made, and indeed it was very good.'*

Responsorial Psalm 103 (104) (optional Psalm 32) – Send forth your Spirit, O Lord

[2] Book of Genesis 22:1-18 (optional Genesis 22: 1– 2. 9-13, 15-18)

'God put Abraham to the test... "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love and go to the land of Moriah. There you shall offer him as a burnt offering." What a terrible command. But in obedience, tested in faith, Abraham rides out with his only son to the designated mountain. The familiar story of young boy and father climbing the mountain and their touching dialogue ends with a different sacrifice and the child lives. An angelic messenger comes to Abraham and says: *'All the nations of the earth shall bless themselves, by your descendants, as a reward for your obedience.'*

Responsorial Psalm 15 (16) – Preserve me God, I take refuge in you

[3] Book of Exodus 14:15- 15:1

'Tell the sons of Israel to march on... raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea... for the sons of Israel to walk through the sea on dry ground... and as day broke the sea returned to its bed... the returning waters overwhelmed the chariots and the horsemen of Pharaoh's whole army... it was then that Moses and the sons of Israel sang this song in honour of the Lord.'

Responsorial Psalm Exodus 15:1-6,17-18 – I will sing to the Lord, glorious his triumph!

[4] Prophet Isaiah 54:5-14

The prophet speaks God's word: *'For now your creator will be your husband... he is called the God of the whole earth. Yes, like a forsaken wife, distressed in spirit, the Lord calls you back... with everlasting love I have taken pity on you, says the Lord, your redeemer.'*

Responsorial Psalm 29 (30) – I will praise you, Lord, you have rescued me.

[5] Prophet Isaiah 55:1-11

'Thus says the Lord: "Oh, come to the water all you who are thirsty; though you have no money, come!... Pay attention, come to me, listen, and your soul will live."' God is faithful to the covenant with the people, even more certain than the rain and snow that fall from the heavens to water the earth. So God says: *'So the word that goes from my mouth does not return to me empty without carrying out my will and succeeding in what it was sent to do.'*

Responsorial Psalm Isaiah 12:2-6 – With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.

[6] Prophet Baruch 3:9-15, 32, 4:4

'Listen, Israel, to commands that bring life; hear, and learn what knowledge means.' With these words the prophet urges us to walk faithfully with our God, to go in search of true wisdom: *'Learn where knowledge is, where strength, where understanding, and so learn where length of days is, where life, where the light of eyes, and where peace.'* This wisdom of God is to be found in the book of the commandments of God.

Responsorial Psalm 18 (19) – You have the message of eternal life, O Lord.

[7] Prophet Ezekiel 36:16-28

'The members of the House of Israel used to live in their own land... I sentenced them as their conduct and actions deserved... I mean to display the holiness of my great name and then I shall... bring you home to your own land. I shall pour clean water over you... I shall give you a new heart, and put a new spirit in you... you shall be my people and I will be your God.'

Responsorial Psalm 41(42) – Like the deer that yearns for running streams, so my soul is yearning for you, my God.

Letter to the Romans 6:3-11

'You have been taught,' says Paul *'that when we were baptised in Christ Jesus we were baptised in his death so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the father's glory, we too might live a new life'*. This is the heart of our Christian faith: *'We believe that having died with Christ we shall return to life with him... death has no more power over him any more.'*

Responsorial Psalm 117 (118) – The Lord's right hand has triumphed. Alleluia!

Gospel according to Mark 16:1-8

'Very early in the morning... they went to the tomb as the son was rising.' Surprised to find the heavy stone at the door rolled back Mary of Magdala and the other Mary, enter the tomb to find a young man seated within who tells them: *'You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified: he is risen, he is not here. See, this is the place where they laid him. But you must go and tell his disciples, and Peter.* The joyful celebration of this night reaches a climax with the celebration of the Eucharist, marking the presence of the risen Christ among his people again, the new leaven, the new bread of life, the New Covenant proclaimed.

Liturgy of Baptism

From early times, baptism was celebrated at this Great Vigil. Those who had been undergoing catechesis and instruction in the faith were invited to accept baptism. So this liturgy includes the blessing of the new waters of baptism, the celebration of the sacrament for candidates being received into the community as new Christians, and also provides the opportunity for all present to renew again their own baptismal promises and commitment to Christ.

Liturgy of the Eucharist

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