

A Sermon for the Great Vigil of Easter 2015
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Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Is there anything as amazing as what we celebrate tonight? I'm not talking about Jesus rising from the dead, as amazing as that is. If that were the whole story of Easter, it would be a short tale, and few would be celebrating tonight.

But Easter isn't about the miraculous resuscitation of a first-century rabble-rouser. It's about the resurrection of us. It's about the resurrection of humankind. It's about your resurrection.

Humankind has been in the grip of death since, well, since almost the beginning, if we believe the old stories. We have this bad habit of choosing the things that diminish life. Selfishness. Distrust. Enmity. Fear. Domination. Cowardice.

Perhaps you have felt yourself in the grip of one of these deadly desires from time to time.

These are the forces that divide us from God and from one another. They are an affront to God, who, as we have heard, made us for love and joy, not fear and enmity, and God finally said "enough."

God said "I will not have my creation despoiled and the children I love enslaved by death any longer." And since everything God had tried up to that point – prophecy, signs and wonders, complaining, acting out, tough love – all these things had met with at best limited success, God came to us in human form so that we could be led away from death, hand to hand, heart to heart.

Everything is blessed this night by what God has done for us. Even sin itself is transformed by Jesus' resurrection, as we heard in the *Exsultet* when the hymn says, "O blessed iniquity for whose redemption such a price was paid by such a Savior."

And there it is. Our reason to rejoice. If even iniquity, if even the sins of all of humankind can be blessed by God's mightiest act, why not us? Why not you? God wants you to be part of the holy family so much that God has moved heaven and earth, broken the laws of nature and of divine justice, and suffered death in order to open the way for you.

And all you have to do is – well, nothing. God didn't save us because we deserve it. God didn't save us because we earn it. God saved us because God loves us.

And what God expects us to do in return is rejoice. God has invited us to the heavenly banquet, and the party has already started.

And that is why we celebrate this night, above all nights. That is why we go out to the streets and invite everyone we know, dead and alive to come rejoice with us. That is why we tell the story of God's mighty deeds, and ring bells, and sing songs, and break bread and drink wine and laugh and shout and maybe even dance.

Because God loved us so much that he came down from heaven and stood fast against the powers of death and suffered humiliating death on a cross at the hands of those powers, and leaped out of the grave and took us by the hand so that you wouldn't be late to the party.

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