

**Homily for Holy Saturday Mass of the Easter Vigil  
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception  
Springfield, Illinois**

**April 19, 2025**

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Reverend Fathers, Deacons, and Consecrated Religious; beloved Elect entering into the Paschal mystery through Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist; and my dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Our liturgy this evening is called the Easter Vigil. The word “vigil” comes from the Latin word “*vigilare*,” which means “to watch” or “to stay awake.” In religious usage, the term “vigil” refers to the eve of a religious festival, an occasion for devotional watching, waiting, and praying. What are we watching, waiting, and praying for?

The introductory rubrics in the *Roman Missal* for the Easter Vigil liturgy say, “By most ancient tradition, this is the night of keeping vigil for the Lord (Ex 12: 42), in which, following the Gospel admonition (Lk 12: 35-37), the faithful, carrying lighted lamps in their hands, should be like those looking for the Lord when He returns, so that at His coming He may find them awake and have them sit at His table.”

We started our Easter Vigil in the courtyard in darkness. After blessing the fire and the Paschal candle, and then lighting the Paschal Candle from the new fire, I said: “May the light of Christ rising in glory dispel the darkness of our hearts and minds.”

After listening to the singing of the Easter Proclamation, called the *Exsultet* in Latin, we held vigil by listening to an extended series of readings from the Bible. Nine readings are provided, namely seven from the Old Testament and two from the New Testament, those being the Epistle and Gospel. It is fitting that seven of the nine readings for the Easter Vigil come from the Old Testament, since the entire Old Testament may be described as an extended vigil, as the people of Israel were watching, waiting, and praying for the arrival of the Messiah. We heard the account of the creation and the story of Abraham and Isaac from the Book of Genesis, Moses leading the people out of slavery as told in the Book of Exodus, and the prophecies from the prophets, Isaiah, Baruch, and Ezekiel. The Red Sea prefigures the savings waters of baptism by which we are freed from slavery to sin.

Then we heard from the New Testament in the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans “we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into

his death . . . so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life.”

In our Gospel from Saint Luke, we heard how Mary Magdalen, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James went to the tomb of Jesus, carrying spices they had prepared. On arriving, they discover that the stone covering the entrance to the tomb has already been rolled away. They enter the tomb but find it empty. Jesus’ body is not there. The women do not know what to make of the empty tomb. Two divine messengers (men in dazzling garments) appear to them. The two messengers ask the women, “Why do you seek the living one among the dead?” This is the high point of the passage. Luke is telling his readers and listeners that resurrection faith is not born from an empty tomb. If they wish to find Jesus, they will not find Him among the dead, in a cemetery. He has been raised.

The divine messengers admonish the women to remember what Jesus said to them while He was still in Galilee. There He described what was to happen to Him: being handed over to sinners, crucified, and rising on the third day. They did indeed remember these words and thereby came to believe that Jesus has been raised. They return from the tomb and announce to the Eleven and others what they remember and what the

divine messengers have told them. The Eleven consider the women's message nonsense and refuse to believe them. Peter even runs to the tomb, finds it empty, but still does not know what to make of it. The best he can do is be amazed, which is not the same thing as believing. Here is the point: Easter faith is not born at an empty tomb but in remembering the words of Jesus that He would be crucified and rise on the third day.

The *Roman Missal* describes the Easter Vigil as "the greatest and most noble of all solemnities." Ever since I was a child I have always looked forward to the Easter Vigil as the highlight of the Church's liturgical year. I wish more people would come to Mass at the Easter Vigil because those who do not come are really missing out on something very special. One of the most important elements of the Easter Vigil occurs when new members of the Church are welcomed through the Sacraments of Initiation. Seeing people entering the Catholic Church is a sign of new life that sends a very hopeful message for the future.

In a few minutes, we will witness the Baptism, Confirmation, and First Eucharist of Brian Collins and Drake Masner, who heard God's call and enrolled in the OCIA—the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults. They have been praying and discerning, and we have been praying with

them and for them. The waters of baptism are a sign that they will have died to sin by the power of God's grace as well as a sign that the Holy Spirit will come upon them and make them sons of God. Then they will be anointed with the sacred chrism, the holy oil that signifies the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and will receive their First Holy Communion to complete their initiation into the Church. This is a great blessing for Brian and Drake, as well as for the whole Church!

Think for a moment about some of the greatest blessings that you have received in life. Although we may first think of God as giving us health, family, and prosperity, the greatest blessing is our spiritual adoption as sisters and brothers in Jesus Christ. The various Scripture passages we heard tonight remind us of a history in which God continually blesses us—and yet the newness of life that began with our Baptism is the best blessing of all!

On this holiest of nights, we pray for those who are about to be baptized throughout our diocese. We enter the quiet of Christ's presence to reaffirm publicly our faith in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ and the hope that this mystery brings of new life for ourselves and for the whole world!

May God give us this grace. Amen.