

Homily: Easter Vigil/ Sunday 2017

“Do We Believe?”

1. Tonight/Today we are celebrating **the most glorious event** of our Catholic Faith: the bodily Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The eternal Son made incarnate came to suffer and die and rise for you and me - in order to set us free from the power of satan, sin and death. As we hear in the reading from Genesis: Everything God made is good - sin tarnished that. As we hear in Exodus: God wanted His people to be free - sin enslaved us. As we hear in Isaiah: God wanted us to know the truth of His ways - sin blinded us. **Sin is the only thing that can keep us away from God’s loving embrace** as St. Paul tells us. Jesus’s Resurrection is the victory over sin and despair. To quote Pope Francis, *“Christ's Resurrection is not a happy ending in a movie, but the intervention of God the Father where human hope is shattered.”* **But do we believe?**
2. We, the followers of Jesus, **have been baptized into His death**, so that by the grace of the Blessed Trinity we too might live in newness of life, which Jesus won for us in His Passion, Death and bodily Resurrection. We are called to be dead to sin and alive for God in Christ Jesus. To think more and more of what is above, what is eternal, not constantly of the passing things of this world, which we tend to do. **But do we believe, and do we act on that belief on a daily basis? Why is it such a challenge for modern man to believe?** As my seminary rector at St. Vincent’s in Latrobe, PA, Fr. Tom Acklin O.S.B., says in his book ***The Passion of the Lamb***, *“It is impossible to be passionate (enthusiastic) about Jesus if we are unsure He ever existed or if we wonder whether His teachings make that much of a difference anyway. The Gospels clearly point out that understanding who Jesus is requires a choice, a passionate choice that will change us completely. Ultimately the Passion of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is the fullest manifestation of what choice is and what it means. For if we believe that His Passion, Death, and Resurrection really took place, then we will have to become passionate (enthusiastic) and take up our cross and (daily) follow Him. (Not just on Christmas and Ash Wednesday and Palm Sunday and Easter! ☺) (And on His*

terms, not ours!) Perhaps this is why we see such resistance to the belief that all of this really took place” (p.4). Something to ponder! And then we have this powerful quote from our retired Holy Father Pope Benedict (from the homily at his 1<sup>st</sup> Mass as Pope in 2005), “*How often we wish that God would show Himself stronger, that He would strike decisively, defeating evil and creating a better world. All ideologies of power justify themselves in exactly this way: they justify the destruction of whatever would stand in the way of progress and the liberation of humanity. We suffer on account of God’s patience. And yet we need his patience. God, who became a lamb, tells us that the world is saved by the Crucified One, not by those who crucified Him. The world is redeemed by the patience of God. It is destroyed by the impatience of man” (p. 57 in *the Passion of the Lamb* book). **The world is redeemed by the patience of God - that is an amazing statement. It is also sustained by His Divine Mercy as Pope Francis points out regularly.** In light of this reality, we should ask ourselves the question, if it applies to us: How long am I going to make God wait until I fully give my heart and life to Him? **We only have this one earthly life to decide our eternal destiny - with God or away from God!** And God will respect our choice. The grace and mercy is always available, if we avail ourselves of it, to make the right choice because of Jesus’s Victory which we are celebrating this Easter weekend. Remember the *Lord’s yoke is easy and His burden is light, as Jesus tells us (Matt 11:28-30)*. Why? Because living a worldly life of self-centeredness and immediate gratification - the yoke of worry and trying to control everything - which our modern world constantly preaches, leads to spiritual sadness and ultimately spiritual death (despair). God wants better for us. **But do we believe?***

3. A little boy came up to me a few years ago in a Catholic school cafeteria and said, “*Father I was watching a show on television and it said Jesus didn’t really die on the Cross and rise from the dead, is that true?*” You could see how pained he was in his little heart. And I said, “*You can’t believe everything you see on television - sometimes they lie. He really did die on the Cross and rise from the dead.*” And he said o.k. and I could see the relief on his face with a little smile as he skipped

back to his lunch table. **Kids are easy to win over; adults usually take more convincing – a real challenge. Why?** We are constantly bombarded by skeptics and unbelievers who mock the Christian message of the Passion, Death and Resurrection as the sole means by which the human race is saved, be it through television shows during Holy Week which deny the sacred truths of our faith or through written works that deny the Faith which are very common in the modern world. **In the end it all originates from the Father of lies: Satan, who has been definitively defeated by Jesus and now in the desperation of his defeat can only try to convince the human race that the Resurrection is just a pious fable. Don't listen to him!** The counter to all this is pray for a deepening of the gift of **FAITH** - to believe with all our heart and soul in Jesus's message of salvation as given to us in the gift of our Catholic faith. To live in **HOPE** - realizing that Jesus will win the victory in our life too, no matter what the obstacles, if we only trust in Him. And finally to give our heart to Jesus in **LOVE** which is shown, not necessarily always in our feelings, but in the daily priorities and actions of our life - *making Him the center of our life by living all the teachings of our Catholic faith with the help of His daily grace, participating in Sunday and Holy Day Mass, and even daily Mass, if possible; receiving the Sacrament of **Confession** on a regular basis; developing a **daily prayer** life; regularly doing **works of charity** for our fellow man; and finally **uniting our daily duties and sufferings with Jesus and offering them in reparation for our past sins, for the good of the Church and the world and our souls and for the souls in Purgatory, so that through the power of the Holy Spirit we may be drawn in Jesus into ever closer in union with our Heavenly Father - so that our life will be a living sacrifice of praise to the glory of the Blessed Trinity.** Please read the little pamphlet in the Easter bulletin to learn how to pray and to pray better . And may we pray with St. Peter and St. Thomas in the Gospel: who both struggled with doubt at different times in their life: ***I do believe, Lord; Help my unbelief!*** As your pastor, hopefully for many years to come ☺, I pray the Lord blesses each of you abundantly on this glorious Easter weekend in whatever way you need blessed in His Divine Mercy, and if anyone needs any spiritual help, please get in touch with me after this coming week. God bless you.*