



2016 Easter Vigil Homily

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St Gerard's Church, Mirrabooka
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When we think of the empty tomb that we finished that little reading with in the Gospel, it's something that can leave us wondering about its meaning, like those women who went to the tomb and they discovered that the body of Jesus was not there. They didn't know what to think. They were asking themselves questions like, "Was the body stolen?" and "Who would do such a thing?" The answer to their questions came from two men dressed brilliantly in this remarkable clothing and, as we heard from another reading of the Vigil, these two were witnesses. We are told that, in order for something to be established as being true, biblically, you need to have two witnesses. So they, through their words to the women, tell the truth that Jesus is risen and will be seen by His disciples in Galilee.

Of course, the empty tomb doesn't prove that the Resurrection occurred. We have to look at the reaction of those women who went to the tomb to understand that. We have to move a little forward in the story to those appearances that Jesus made and that the Gospels have preserved for us. They're the means by which we can understand the meaning of the empty tomb. When the body of Jesus again received His life as new life, there was no one there to see it. We can't know how the Resurrection took place. But what we do know is that Jesus was seen alive after He had been killed and buried. The marks of the crucifixion were visible in His hands and feet and in His side. He allowed Himself to be touched. He ate with His disciples. He spoke to them and brought them from doubt to faith, enough for them, in turn, to become witnesses to the Resurrection.

So it's these appearances of Jesus that are very, very important to us. They're the reason for our faith. They're the reason that Peter came to faith and the rest of the apostles, and for Mary to understand these things that she had treasured in her heart right from the first days of Jesus' life, and to the women who followed Jesus throughout that journey that He took from His homeland of Galilee to Jerusalem. Also, in our case, of course, the appearances of Jesus in our lives are different, but they are important to us. We, who have had the privilege of being in these communities, have learned how to recognise the risen Lord who has become present in our lives. The Word of God itself has been the way in which we have found the light, in that sense, being able to discover through the Catechesis the way in which we hear the Word of God. Our



ears have been opened and we expect the Lord to speak to us when we hear the word 'proclaim'. After many years, trained by the Word Himself, we have the words of our own in order to give witness to our faith. We can identify how the risen Lord is present and has been present in our lives. We can talk about the experiences that we've had of going down in death and of rising with the power of the risen Christ. It's a pattern that we have come to understand in our lives. It's something that we celebrate, of course, when we come to the Eucharist. When we talk of it, we give it a name: it is the House of Mystery – the dying and the rising of Christ, yes, but the dying and rising in our own lives, with Christ.

So we come now very soon to the heart of this Vigil, this Vigil of waiting and of being expectant, and that is the liturgy of baptism. You'll witness here the wonderful blessing of the Father, calling more of our children to become His adopted children. As they pass through the waters of the font, they will be going down into death, but not alone. They will discover Christ there and He will pull them out of the deadly waters to become a new creation, to become a son or daughter of God.

In a very important way, though, we, you – the parents and the community – are called to give witness to the Lord, to the fact that He lives, from the stories of the appearances that He's made in your life and my life. Those stories of the appearance of the Lord in our life, these are the means by which we can hopefully bring these children to faith, helping them, in turn, to look back to the baptismal font, where they first encountered Christ. Of course, they will walk in a community in the future and it will be within that community that they will come to relive this event that we are about to witness and they will understand more intensely, much more deeply, what it means. However, that witness that we give, those ways in which we tell the stories from our own life of the appearance of the Lord from time to time – when we have been able to see Him, when our ears have been open to hear Him – this will be the way, the most important way that we have of handing this faith on.

We become jaded in our faith at times. We become impatient with God, we become angry and we wonder, not knowing what to think about God and the work that he's doing with us, just as those women had felt when they saw the empty tomb. They wondered, they questioned, they were angry and they misread, or misinterpreted perhaps, what had happened. But, tonight, we have this opportunity as we witness this baptism, that a promise of the Lord is being fulfilled for them as it has been for us, that they, tonight, will become a new creation, just as we became a new creation on that day of our baptism, when that powerful Spirit of the risen Lord enters into our listlessness and our heavenless and brings us new hope and new life, if we want Him to. There's no one else that we can go to for life, and He has already proven so many times in our histories His love and His mercy for us.

So, tonight, as we continue with this celebration, we pray that this wonderful event of the baptisms that we are about to witness will, in fact, be a great encouragement to us to look back to that font, in a sense to that empty tomb, to look back to that tomb where we encountered



Christ for the first time, that we have understood better what that meant and what that encounter has done for us. We pray that, tonight, as these children enter into the waters of baptism, they will be a sign to us of that great love of the Father for us, calling us to be His children, promising us that He will send His Spirit to us, and that Spirit is our life and our hope.