

**“Christ’s Resurrection: Our Restoration to God’s Original Order of Creation”**  
**Homily – Easter Vigil Mass**  
**April 15, 2017**

**Introduction**

We certainly just heard very many readings for our Mass tonight! Yes, it is quite unusual, but then again, this is a very unique kind of a Mass! The point of so many readings is to take us on a stroll throughout Old Testament history, leading us then up into the New. These readings touch on *some* (but only some) of the primary moments in salvation history.

**The Pattern of Salvation**

And it all, of course, culminates in the Resurrection, which we celebrate tonight. Likewise, our celebration tonight is the culmination of our forty-day fast through Lent, the celebration of which is intensified in the final week we now conclude, in the powerful ceremonies of Holy Week. Notice how our readings tonight, charting that course of history throughout the Old Testament, start at the very beginning of the Bible, and quite literally: the beginning of creation. The Liturgy of the Word begins with this reading because it sets the whole pattern for our redemption. Notice how it describes God’s creative activity: not as God creating something out of nothing (which of course it doesn’t deny, since that certainly has to be the case). Rather, listen again to the very first verse of the Bible: “In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless wasteland, and darkness covered the abyss, while a mighty wind swept over the waters.”

The first verse of the Bible paints a scene of chaos; and what does God do? He starts by separating out the elements of creation (light and darkness, the sky and the earth, water and land), and then gradually builds up the entire work of creation, culminating in the creation of the man and the woman. In other words, God’s creative activity consists in creating *order out of chaos*. Order is a sure sign that God’s grace at work; where there is order, God’s grace in some way or another is operative. This, then, gives us insight into what it means that God created the man and the woman in His image: we reflect God’s likeness insofar as we can do the same.

The problem, though, is that too often we do the opposite! That is, we alter the good order that God put into the universe, and always to our demise. This is what happens two chapters later in the Book of Genesis, the story about the fall of Adam and Eve. The moral to the story, though, is that this is something that we all do. So instead of mirroring God and creating order out of chaos, we create chaos out of order! This is true in every age; it most definitely marked even the relationship of God’s people of old to their Lord. We heard the Prophet Baruch (6<sup>th</sup> reading) proclaim the following: “How is it, Israel, that you are in the land of your foes, grown old in a foreign land, defiled with the dead, accounted with those destined for the netherworld?”

He was preaching to a people whose kingdom had been destroyed, and were exiled to foreign countries. This was the result of their violation of the Covenant their Lord had made with them: instead of being faithful to God’s Law which gives wisdom, the Torah, they made covenants with their pagan neighbors and worshipped their false gods. That is why he tells them, “You have forsaken the fountain of wisdom!” They are defiled with the dead because they are living among people who do not know the one, true God, the God who entered into a special relationship with them, like no other race on the face of the earth. Instead, they forsook that fountain of wisdom, out of envy for the power and might of their pagan neighbors. Their story is

not a curious history lesson, though; no, it is emblematic of all humanity – the human race as corporate whole, and each one individually. When we begin to tinker with the order of creation that God put into place, thinking that we have a better way, it always comes back to haunt us, making everything worse.

### **Salvation as Restoration**

Now, this chaos which we have created for ourselves does not nullify God's image in us, but it does weaken it, it tarnishes it; one might say that God's image is defaced in us, but it is still there. Yes, we can still create, which sets us apart of all the rest of creation, we can put order into place where there is chaos – and notice how when you do so, everything is so much more pleasing and harmonious. This, again, is a sign of God's grace at work. But this creative power of ours is confined to this world of time. When it comes to restoring order at the cosmic, eternal level, we cannot do that, it is beyond us. Ultimately, we cannot get ourselves out of this mess we've gotten ourselves into.

That's the bad news; *but*, there is Good News: God has done this for us! This is what Christ's Resurrection means: God took on a human body so that He could do this at one and the same time *for* us and *by* us. The Resurrection is a complete new beginning for all of humanity, as the post-Resurrectional accounts of our Lord make clear. In St. Matthew's account which we just heard proclaimed in the Gospel for this Mass, he tells us: "After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb." The beginning of a new day, on the first day of the week: a new beginning for humanity.

God did this within our world, in our own time and history. The Jewish belief in the resurrection is actually quite ancient. We know, for example, that the Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead, and it continues among many Jews to this day. The Jewish belief, though, is that the resurrection of the dead will happen at the end of all history, when all will be assembled in Jerusalem to arise. But with his Son Jesus Christ, God has made this happen within the midst of our own history. This means that our salvation is already accomplished. The glory of Christ rising from the dead is the culmination of all of salvation history.

This, though, applies in a general way, for the human race as a whole, but the personal salvation history of each one of us is still being worked out. This evening will be a significant moment in this personal salvation history for our brothers and sisters who will receive the sacraments of initiation into the Church at this Easter Vigil Mass. This is the very meaning of the Christian life: the sacrament of Baptism is not just a wonderful moment in one's faith life confined to history, but rather a mystery to be lived out with one's entire life, so that one may attain the salvation which Christ has already won for us.

This is what St. Paul is teaching about in his letter to Romans, when he tells us that being baptized into Christ Jesus means being baptized into his death. Notice the distinction he makes here. First he says, "We know that Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more; death no longer has power over him." This is what Christ has accomplished for us, the work of our salvation: it is complete. But then he goes onto say, "Consequently, you too must think of yourselves as being dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus." In other words, we must live out this baptismal mystery in our personal lives, in our very bodies.

### **Conclusion**

As we glory in the joy of this Easter season, let us take it as a motivation to keep our minds and hearts open to the working of God's grace in our lives, that He may restore for each of

us the order proper to His plan, and so that then through us the light of Christ's Resurrection might illuminate the whole world, making it a more perfect image of His Kingdom of light and love, of justice, truth, and peace.