



The Holy See

EASTER VIGIL

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE JOHN PAUL II

Holy Saturday 3 April 1999 1. "The stone rejected by the builders has become the corner-stone" (Ps 117:22) On this night, the liturgy speaks to us with all the abundance and wealth of the word of God. This Vigil is not only the heart of the liturgical year, but is in some ways its womb: from it springs all of sacramental life. We could say that on this night the table round which the Church gathers with her children, especially with those who are about to be baptized, has been lavishly prepared. My thoughts turn to you, dear catechumens, who are soon to be reborn by water and the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 3:5). With great joy I greet you and the lands from which you come: Albania, Cape Verde, China, France, Morocco and Hungary. Through Baptism you will become members of the Body of Christ, sharing fully in the mystery of communion found there. May your life be immersed for ever in this Easter mystery, so that you will always be true witnesses to God's love. 2. Not only you, dear catechumens, but all the baptized are called on this night, in faith, to experience profoundly what we have just heard in the Letter to the Romans: "Do you know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by Baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:3-4). To be Christians means to share personally in the Death and Resurrection of Christ. This sharing is brought about sacramentally by Baptism, upon which, as a solid foundation, the Christian life of each one of us is built. And this is why the Responsorial Psalm urged us to give thanks: "Praise the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy is everlasting... The Lord's right hand... has worked wonders. I shall not die, I shall live and recount the works of the Lord" (Ps 117:1-2, 16-17). On this holy night, the Church echoes these words of thanksgiving, confessing the truth that Christ "suffered death and was buried; on the third day he rose again" (cf. Creed). 3. "This will be a night of vigil in honour of the Lord... from generation to generation" (Ex 12:42). These words of the Book of Exodus conclude the account of the departure of the Israelites from Egypt. They resound with special eloquence during the Easter Vigil, from which they draw their full meaning. In this year dedicated to God the Father, how can we fail to think of this night, Easter night, as the great night of the Father's "vigil"? This watch by God embraces to the entire Easter Triduum. But in a special way the Father keeps watch during Holy Saturday, while the Son lies dead in the tomb. The mystery of Christ's victory over the sin of the world is kept safe precisely by the Father's watching. He *watches* over the whole earthly mission of the Son. His infinite compassion reaches its summit in the hour of passion and death: the hour when the Son is abandoned, so that the sons and daughters might be saved; when the Son is despised and rejected, so that the sons and daughters might be found once again; when the Son dies, so that the sons and daughters may find new life. The Father's watch explains the Resurrection of the Son: even in the hour of death, the bond of love in God does not fail; nor does the Holy Spirit who,

poured out by the dying Jesus on the Cross, fills with light the darkness of evil and raises Jesus from the dead, designating him as Son of God in power and glory (cf. Rom 1:4).4. “The stone rejected by the builders has become the corner-stone” (Ps 117:22). In the light of Christ’s Resurrection, how wonderfully we see in all its fullness the truth of which the Psalmist sings! Condemned to a shameful death, the Son of Man, crucified and risen, has become the corner-stone of the Church’s life and of the life of every Christian. “This is the work of the Lord: a marvel in our eyes” (Ps 117:23). It happened on this holy night. The women recognized it when, “the day after the Sabbath while it was still dark” (Jn 20:1), they went to the tomb to anoint the body of the Lord and found the tomb empty. They heard the angel’s voice: “Do not be afraid! You are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here. He is risen” (cf. Mt 28:11-5). Thus the prophetic words of the Psalmist were fulfilled: “The stone rejected by the builders has become the corner-stone”. This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church and we are proud to profess it on the threshold of the third millennium, because the Passover of Christ is the hope of the world, yesterday, today and for ever. Amen! © Copyright 1999 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

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