

Easter Vigil

(Genesis 1:1-2:2 / Genesis 22:1-18 / Exodus 14:15-15:1 / Isaiah 54:5-14 / Isaiah 55:1-11 /
Baruch 3:9-15,32-4:4 / Ezekiel 36:16-28 / Romans 6:3-11 / Matthew 28:1-10)
19.04.2014

Among one of the most comforting, consoling, hope-filled and life-giving passages I have ever read, outside the Sacred Scriptures, is a text by the late Cardinal Basil Hume, OSB.

In his book *To Be A Pilgrim* in a piece entitled *After Death* the Cardinal speaks of each one of us having a story to tell, or at least part of a story, that no one has ever heard before.

The Cardinal goes on to say that when we die and are brought before the Judgement Seat we will begin to whisper our story, or that part of our story never told before, and, as we speak it into the ear of our loving God, we will hear the Lord reassure us that He already knows the whole story of our life and that He accepts us and welcomes us as we are, with the story that is ours.

The Cardinal implies that at the moment of our death we will at last be free enough to recount our whole story, including that part of our story around which we are maybe somewhat embarrassed and even totally ashamed while still here on earth.

Standing before the Lord, there will be no room for and no need of pretence.

Exposed to God's love which covers with mercy all our shame, we will feel no need to hide anything.

We will find ourselves released from our present tendency to take refuge in denial and pretence.

Having passed over into the world which is to come through our death to life in this world, we will find the words we just could not find here on earth to express our hidden fears and uncertainties, our hidden guilt and shame.

We will be able to own up to our weaknesses. We will be free to admit to our faults and flaws. We will be ready to confess our sins and reveal ourselves as we truly are, without any self-adornment or self-justification.

Of course, we will also be in a position to give thanks for so many graces and blessings we have received in life, recognising that these are just as much part of our lives as are our shortcomings and failures.

Having *passed over*, we will be able to recognise all the good things that have come our way in this life, the goodness that is within us and, even more than that, the goodness we are in ourselves!

We will be able to see ourselves as we heard God sees us in tonight's first reading from the Book of Genesis.

We will be able to see ourselves as persons who are fundamentally good, people in whom God delights and declares to be *very good*.

The moment of our encounter with God after death will be a great moment of peace and reconciliation.

We will see death transformed by God's grace into the necessary passage into true life.

We will be given to see ourselves caught up in Christ's Resurrection light, transfigured and transformed by it.

At the moment of our passing over with and in Christ, death will show itself as having the power to

wash us clean and make us new.

To quote the Scriptures: *What a great a terrible day that will be!*

Yes, *great and terrible*, not in the sense of causing us fear and terror, but *great and terrible* in the sense of being a cause of tremendous excitement for us.

When we stand before the *Mercy Seat* of God what we will be led to feel is awe.

We will feel awed before the immeasurable goodness, the great glory and the wonderful majesty of God.

The One waiting for us, seated upon the Judgement Seat on that day, will reveal Himself to be none other than the loving, merciful and compassionate Father who sent His Son to redeem us!

All this says something to us that we need to hear and believe as true tonight: **God is on our side!**

It is the *Tempter*, the *Prince of Lies* and *Master of Deception*, who suggests otherwise to us.

It is the *Diabolos* who depicts God as set against us and out to get us!

We said a moment ago *death will prove itself as having the power to wash us clean*.

That phrase is an important one for us to hear on this Sacred Night in which we are invited to remember our baptism in Christ.

The apostle assures us that *those who have died with Christ in baptism will rise with Him*.

It is this which leads me to say *death washes clean*.

Not only are we washed clean in the waters of baptism, but these waters prove themselves to be waters of rebirth and so we are given a fresh start with Christ.

It seems to me that as we listened to the story of God's People in the long Liturgy of the Word which constituted the first part of this Solemn Vigil, what we were invited to do was to replay and relive our own life story, including those parts of our life story with which we are less than comfortable ... including those parts of our life story which we have never been able to recount to another human being and/or maybe not even admit to ourselves, ashamed, as many of us are, of who we are and/or what we are not.

The great consoling grace of this Night is that just as we read the story of God's People in the light of the Risen Christ, symbolised by the Easter Candle burning by the lectern, so we can re-read our own stories in that same wondrous light: a light which bathes all in grace and compassion.

The invitation addressed to us in the course of this liturgy is an invitation to apply the gracious, benevolent light of Christ to our own life story in a way that transforms and transfigures our history into the story of God's saving grace at work in our favour in and through all the vicissitudes life leads us to traverse.

The light shining down upon us as we re-read our personal stories, bowed down under the authority of God's Word which we have heard proclaimed this night, carries healing in its rays.

We can apply not just the warm glow of Christ's light to our story, but also the cauterising fire of God's Holy Spirit.

Fire is a powerful force.

We know it can destroy and so we cast into the fire of God set aflame this night all the negative forces at work within us, all the dross, all the guilt, all the shame.

We cast especially our sin into the purifying new fire of Easter.

In doing this we remember that fire is also a positive force and is symbolic of God's Spirit.

Our Easter fire is to be understood in this way

We sing in the repertoire of chants used here at the monastery the following lines which we could make our prayer tonight: *Within our darkest night, You kindle a fire that never dies away.*

The positive fire of this Night is the very life of Christ which we welcome with the new flame of Easter.

The Easter fire carries within it God's own life and benediction.

It is with Easter fire that God constantly blesses us, His people.

The fire of Easter is nothing other than a reminder of the love lit in God's own heart in our regard. His love is always aflame and ever burning with the desire to see us live in communion with Him ... even when our flame grows dim.

Having listened to God's Word and seen it as a bright shining torch to enlighten and guide us, in just few moments we will take up the great invitation addressed to us in the second part of tonight's liturgy: the invitation to plunge ourselves anew into the waters of rebirth, remembering our baptism which is recalled to us by our being sprinkled with the blessed Easter water.

May we dare to bathe our lives in the cleansing waters of God's grace which we contemplated on Good Friday as a stream of life flowing from Christ's side to reach each one of us where we are in our lives at this point in our story.

May we see the water blessed for us as a sign of God's refreshing love given for the restoration of our lives.

May we allow ourselves to be cooled, refreshed, restored, renewed in the bracing bath of our baptism, seeing the font of our baptism for what it really is: the living, incessantly renewed, source of our life in Christ.

Amen!