

Easter Sunday
April 4, 2010
Fr. Bill McGinty

“Semper Fi”

Lent is over. The six weeks of Lent have come and gone. We Christians look back today at the journey of Lent and what it meant to us spiritually. In Lent we tried to make sacrifices. We examined our lives and became determined to become better people. The purpose of Lent reminded us that this was a time of penance when we seek forgiveness and re-dedicate ourselves to prayer and worship. In Lent, we prayed more, came to church one extra day a week and meditated on scripture and bible study.

Now that Lent is over, we should feel refreshed, renewed and new people. Christ invited us on Palm Sunday to walk with him through Holy Week and embrace the death that he had to face. That is why we stood with him, here on Good Friday at that so short service of remembrance. Before us the Altar Lay bare, the candles and flowers were gone. The tabernacle lay open and empty, only the wooden cross stood witness to Christ's death.

On Friday evening, we stood here to witness to our faith. We stood to say that Jesus' way is the right way. Love is better than hate; peace is better than war' justice is better than greed; kindness is better than violence. On Friday night, we did not need top sing. We had no need of a pipe organ, for on Good Friday God does not need our praise nor our worship. On Good Friday God needs to know that his son Jesus Christ did not die alone, but that we stood here with him.

On Friday night, we got to feel the way the women who stood by the cross felt as they left the hillside of Calvary and took Jesus' limp dead body and buried him in the tomb. There cannot have been much talking as they made their way home through the dark, weaving their way through the narrow streets of Jerusalem.

It was the Sabbath, and not just any Sabbath, but the Sabbath of the Passover. The city was full of visitors. On the Saturday the temple was full of worshippers. Perhaps, some wondered how the great curtain had mysteriously turn. Most of the Sanhedrin and the Jewish leadership, had left the city. Roman soldiers guarded strategic intersections. But, of the followers of Jesus, there was no sign.

Holy Saturday is always a busy day in the church. The Altar guild are always here early. They take down the hangings of holy week and Lent and pack them away for another year. Every thing has a place, a box, a label. Flowers begin to arrive. The Paschal candle is got ready. The fire at the back of the church is prepared. Candles will be distributed to every member as they enter the darkened church. There will be no music as the church ready for the Great Vigil of Easter

The Great Vigil of Easter, is the Super bowl of the church's year. It is the Fourth of July, Thanksgiving and Christmas all rolled into one.

At the Easter Vigil the first spark of the Paschal fire of Easter represents that first gasping breathe that the dead body of Jesus took lying on the cold hard rock of his tomb. With that breathe, a

radiance so bright split the darkness of that cold dark damp place and the mighty stone of burial rolled to one side.

Last night, we all stood in that tomb waiting, our candles in hand, we waited for the first sight of a light, a flame, a fire. In it came, hoisted high in the aisle, the bright naked flame of resurrection. The flame that said: "I am Christ and I am alive. I have risen."

"The light of Christ." a voice exclaimed. We all shouted back "Thanks be to God." As the words reverberated around the church last night, the flame passed from candle to candle, bathing the church in lights. By the time the Paschal candle reached the Sanctuary, we all stood with the lighted candle of our baptism. We stood ready to make our annual pledge of allegiance. Not to a country or a state, but to our God and the king, who died for us and rose again on the third day.

Last night we read the passage from scripture that traced the history of our salvation. On vigil night, I always feel one with all those Christians who made salvation possible in my life by passing on the flame. At the Easter vigil my parents are not dead, they are right here. On vigil night, I see the faces of old friends long gone. At the Easter vigil we are the communion of saints and death has no fears for us. For on that night, we know that we are one with the risen Christ, and that at the moment of our death, he will be one with us. We will not go lonely into that good night, we will go gloriously into the resurrection of all the communion of saints.

Easter morning, is the first day of the honeymoon, for all of us Christians. If you just arrived this morning, then you missed the wedding, the taking of vows and the kiss of love that each one of us received from the risen Christ. Easter begins today, to tell us that it is time to get busy with business of Christ. The business of Christ is his church. Christ's church's job, is to complete his mission.

In the name of marriage. And I want to help her.

That mission is not some nebulous vision of putting the world to rights in the name of social justice. The mission of this church is hard core Christianity, in the footprints of our Lord and Savior, right here, right now, in this place and immediately. For when we stood, candle in hand last night, and renewed our baptismal vows. When we stood as one body and recited our great creed, we were not repeating empty words. We were saying: "This is not a social club where we turn up four times a year, it is a place where we feed the poor as Jesus commanded and I want to help. This is not a gathering of Milford's elite, gathered for social discourse, this is helpers of Safe Haven, who will fight tooth and nail to stop some poor girls face being battered to pulp in the name of marriage. And I want to help her."

We don't make those vows because we have the prettiest church in town, we make our Baptismal vows because we care; we care that our Veteran's get a fair deal' we care that our boys and girls are dying and hurting in a foreign land; we care so much that we want to work and pray for a peace that comes after their sacrifice, a peace that will last.

Last night, we prayed and vowed that as Christians we would never desert the mission of Christ that this church belongs to. We will strive with all our might to protect every child from abuse. We will care for children in the best Christian center in town. We will support the family; visit the sick. Reach out to our members in hospital and shut-ins. We will care for the lonely' we will heal the tortured soul; in Jesus name; we will not let you die alone and forgotten. We will rap the

bereaved in God's tender mercies, and in our love.

This is our vow. This is what our baptismal promises men. This is the blood, sweat and tears of our parish life and its mission. "If you do not recognize it, then you are only an occasional visitor. We welcome you to our worship. We are so sorry if you thought you were coming to a quaint little country church. We are not a quaint little country church. We are a church in the front line of a war that is raging.. A war of good over evil, love over hate, kindness over good, American values over post modern, family over division, God over atheism, prayer over hopelessness.

Easter renews us. Strengthen us. Fills our ranks anew. Easter renews our hope as Christians. Our compass is the cross of Christ. Our badge is the cross of Christ. Our mission is to carry that cross into our lives and make it significant.

Today you are asked to be a "Significant Christian." Today we are asked to wear the banner of Christ risen, and his cross with pride. In the words of the old hymn "We are soldiers, marching as to war." Let our motto too be Semper Fi. Always faithful, as Christ was faithful on the cross for us.

May the blessings of Easter won for us on the cross fill your lives and family with his grace.
Amen+