**The Great Vigil of Easter**

April 20, 2014

Exodus 14:10-15:1, Ezekiel 36:24-28, Ezekiel 37:1-14

In a moment, we will have the awesome privilege of celebrating the baptisms of Devin and Miraya; and we will, at the *same* time, reaffirm our **own** baptismal vows.

Our liturgy and readings tonight, up until this point, have been *brimming over* with the language and symbolism of God’s saving and transforming acts down through history. Our first reading told the story of the first Passover, culminating in the saving of the people of Israel through the waters of the Red Sea. It is that central event of Jewish history which, though we moderns might argue whether God delighted in the killing of those Egyptians as much as the Israelites did, nonetheless came to symbolize for Jews ever since the powerfully saving, caring love of God. For *us*, it is not the water of the *Red Sea* through which we are loved and saved, the Jewish Passover, but rather the water of **baptism**, that *living* water flowing from the side of Jesus, which shows us – and showers us with! – the powerfully saving, caring love of God. Christ, ***our*** Passover, is sacrificed *for us*, in his act of dying and rising again.

In our second reading, we heard the spine-tingling poetic prophecy of Ezekiel promising us that not *only* will God sprinkle cleansing water on us (the water of baptism), he will remove from our body the heart of **stone** and give us a heart of *flesh*, putting his own spirit into us! Now, someone who has a heart of stone is not *alive*, but dead; so, when God gives us a heart of *flesh* again, he brings us back to life! Once again, the movement is from death to life!

In our third reading, we heard the awe-inspiring, breathtaking story of Valley of the Dry Bones, symbolizing, we are told, “the whole house of Israel”, who have said, “Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely” – a situation with which many of us could, at one time or another, identify. Ezekiel speaks the word of God into this bleak and hopeless situation, and the bones come together, bone on bone, sinew on sinew, flesh on flesh; and then God breathes his Spirit into this vast multitude, and they live!

One more time, what is dead is made alive through the saving, life-giving act of God!

St. Paul tells us, “we have been buried with Christ by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” (Romans 6:4)

What does that mean to you – that in baptism, you have died with Christ and are raised with him?

Episcopal monk Curtis Almquist tells what it means to him\*: “[It means] surrender,” he writes. “The surrendering of our lives.  Surrendering any notion that we ‘possess’ our own lives.  *My life does* **not** *belong to me.*  That is how I would speak about having died with Christ and being raised with him.  We don’t possess our own lives.  I would say we are stewards of the life that God has given us, [now] and for however long God continues to give us breath.  I think of it as being loaned back into life after baptism.  And so I would say that our life is not about hoarding or about conserving itself for its own sake but its opposite: about giving.  Our life is about willingly giving up our life and our life’s energies as we see in Christ’s own self-emptying.

“A wonderful way to think and pray about the life you’ve been given to steward is to face into the certainty of your own death.  The only thing ***un***certain about death is **how** and **when** we will die.  Death is a part of life.  By facing into the inevitability of death you may find enormous freedom and clarity in the moments of life which are still ahead for you – be it as much as another day or week or month or year or perhaps many years…

“So we say that in our baptism we give up the delusion that we possess our own life, and we acknowledge that our life needs to be salvaged by Christ.  And then we are loaned back into life for a little while with Jesus’ promise that he’s going to use us, he’s going to use you.  You will re-present Christ to this world – your sheer presence, [Devin and Miraya], your words, your touch, your actions, beyond which you could ask or imagine, and in ways that Christ will set up.  Channel it.  Channel that power, that light, that life, that love of Christ.  Channel it generously, don’t hoard… and don’t worry.

“As all of you leave the church following this service, you might find it meaningful to dip your fingers into the water in the baptismal font, and retrace the sign of the cross made on your head at baptism, as a reminder that we ‘have died with Christ and are raised with him.’  We give up both the delusion *and* the burden of *possessing* life.  We acknowledge that we are neither the author nor finisher of life.  We’re a steward of life, a participant, a player, an agent, an ambassador on a short-term, mortal assignment by Christ.  Who knows for how long?”

And so the word today to you, Devin, Miraya, and to all of us, is:

“Give it your all; and you will be given all you need.”

AMEN

*\*(from an email devotion sent by the Society of St. John the Evangelist)*