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EASTER SUNDAY "RESURRECTION OF THE LORD"

EASTER VIGIL IN THE HOLY NIGHT

PAPAL MASS

HOMILY OF POPE LEO XIV

Saint Peter's Basilica
Saturday, 4 April 2026

[Multimedia]

"The sanctifying power of this night dispels wickedness, washes faults away, restores innocence to the fallen... drives out hatred, fosters concord and brings down the might *ŷxultet*).

With these words at the beginning of this celebration, dear brothers and sisters, the deacon praised the light of the Risen Christ, symbolized by the Paschal Candle. From this single candle, we have all lit our own candles, and, each carrying a small flame drawn from the same fire, we have illuminated this great basilica. It is the sign of the Paschal light, which unites us in the Church as lights for the world. At the deacon's announcement, we responded "Amen," affirming our commitment to embrace this mission, and shortly we will repeat our "yes" by renewing our baptismal promises.

This, my dear friends, is a Vigil filled with light, the oldest in the Christian tradition, known as the "mother of all vigils." In it we relive the victory of the Lord of life over death and the underworld. We do this, as part of one great celebration, after having journeyed in recent days through the mysteries of the Passion of the God who became for us "a man of sorrows" (*Is* 53:3), "despised and rejected by men" (*ibid.*), tortured and crucified.

Is there a greater act of charity? A more complete gift? The risen One is the same creator of the universe who, just as he brought us into existence out of nothing at the dawn of history, also gave his life for us on the Cross to show us his boundless love.

The first reading reminded us of this with the account of creation. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth (cf. *Gen* 1:1), bringing the cosmos out of chaos, harmony out of disorder and entrusting to us – made in his image and likeness – the task of being its stewards. Even when, through sin, humanity failed to live up to that plan, the Lord did not abandon us, but revealed his merciful face to us in an even more surprising way – through forgiveness.

The “holy mystery of this night,” then, has its roots even in the place where humanity’s first failure took place, and extends across the centuries as a path of reconciliation and grace.

Through the sacred texts we have heard, the liturgy has shown us some of the stages of this journey. It reminded us how God stopped Abraham’s hand as he was about to sacrifice his son Isaac, to show us that he does not desire our death, but rather that we dedicate ourselves to being, in his hands, living members of the lineage of those who are saved (cf. *Gen* 22:11–12, 15–18). In the same way, the liturgy invited us to reflect on how the Lord freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, transforming the sea – a place of death and an insurmountable obstacle – into the gateway to a new life of freedom. The same message echoed in the words of the prophets, who praised God as a bridegroom who calls and gathers (cf. *Is* 54:5–7), a spring that quenches thirst, water that brings forth fruit (cf. *Is* 55:1,10), a light that shows the way to peace (cf. *Bar* 3:14) and Spirit who transforms and renews the heart (cf. *Ez* 36:26).

In all of these moments in the history of salvation, we have seen how God responds to the hardness of sin – which divides and kills – with the power of love, which unites and restores life. We have heard the narrative interwoven with psalms and prayers, reminding us that, through Christ’s Paschal Mystery, “we were buried with him by baptism into death... we too might walk in newness of life... dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (cf. *Rm* 6:4,11); we are therefore consecrated in Baptism to the Father’s love, united in the communion of saints and made, by grace, living stones for the building up of his Kingdom (cf. *1 Pet* 2:4–5).

In this light, let us reflect on the story of the Resurrection, which we heard in the Gospel according to Matthew. On Easter morning, the women, overcoming their grief and fear, set out on their journey. They wanted to go to Jesus' tomb. They expected to find it sealed, with a large stone at the entrance and soldiers standing guard. This is what sin is: a heavy barrier that closes us off and separates us from God, seeking to kill his words of hope within us. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, however, did not let themselves be intimidated. They went to the tomb and, thanks to their faith and love, became the first witnesses of the Resurrection. In the earthquake and in the angel sitting on the overturned stone, they saw the power of God's love, stronger than any force of evil, capable of "driving out hatred" and "bringing down the mighty." Man can kill the body, but the life of the God of love is eternal life, which transcends death and which no tomb can imprison. Thus the Crucified One reigned from the cross, the angel sat upon the stone, and Jesus appeared to them alive, saying, "Greetings!" (Mt 28:9).

This, my dear friends, is also our message to the world today. The encounter to which we want to bear witness – through the words of faith and the works of charity – we do so by "singing" with our lives the "Alleluia" that we proclaim with our lips (cf. Saint Augustine, *Sermon 256*, 1). Just as the women rushed to tell the disciples, we too should desire to set out tonight from this Basilica to bring to all the good news that Jesus has risen and that having risen with him, through his power, we too can give life to a new world of peace and unity as "a multitude of people and yet [...] a single person, for although there are many Christians, Christ is one" (Saint Augustine, *Commentaries on the Psalms*, 127:3).

Our brothers and sisters gathered here, who come from various parts of the world and are about to receive Baptism, will dedicate themselves to this mission. After the long journey of the catechumenate, today they are reborn in Christ to become new creatures (cf. 2 Cor 5:17) and witnesses to the Gospel. To them, and to all of us, let us repeat what Saint Augustine said to the Christians of his time: "Proclaim Christ, sow..., spread everywhere what you have conceived in your heart" (*Sermon 116*, 23–24).

Sisters and brothers, even today there are tombs to be opened, and often the stones sealing them are so heavy and so closely guarded that they seem to be immovable. Some weigh heavily on the human heart, such as mistrust, fear, selfishness and resentment; others, stemming from these inner struggles, sever the bonds between us through war, injustice and the isolation of peoples and nations. Let us not allow ourselves to be paralyzed by them! Over the centuries, many men and women, with God's help, have rolled them away — perhaps with great effort, sometimes at the cost of their lives — but with good fruits that we still benefit from today. They are not unattainable figures, but people like us who, strengthened by the grace of the Risen One, in charity and truth, had the courage to speak, as the Apostle Peter says, the "very words of God" (*1 Pet 4:11*) and to act "with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified" (*ibid.*).

Let us be inspired by their example, and on this Holy Night let us make their commitment our own, so that the Easter gifts of harmony and peace may grow and flourish everywhere and always throughout the world.

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The **HOLY SEE**

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