

Easter Vigil

Cathedral of Saint Paul
April 3, 2010 at 8:00 p.m.

by The Most Reverend John C. Nienstedt

Praise be Jesus Christ, now and forever!

Quite frequently, as I go about making visits to our Catholic schools or religious education programs, I am asked the question: “Bishop, do you have a favorite Scripture passage?” That’s a hard question to answer because I have so many favorites. But certainly among that list would be the nine passages that we have listened to tonight.

The majesty and care of God’s work of creation, the incomparable faith of Abraham, the courageous leadership of Moses under God’s direction, the tender, yet challenging words of Isaiah – how can we fail to be inspired? These readings are like the jeweled stones that make up a beautiful mosaic, presenting in a dramatic way the extraordinary love of God in His plan for our salvation.

But, I think the words that we need to hear most this evening are the five words that come from the lips of Jesus in St. Matthew’s Gospel – “Peace, do not be afraid.” “Peace, do not be afraid.”

A.) The Hebrew word for “peace is shalom and it implies more than the absence of war or the quiet solitude of a secluded hill-side.

Shalom means the restoration of reality to its original condition. It means a return to integrity and wholeness.

Thus, when a jeweler fixes a broken watch, he restores “shalom” to that timepiece. When a doctor mends a broken leg, he brings “shalom” to the injured patient. When Jesus speaks the word “Shalom” to the holy women on Easter morn, he is saying, “You are now freed from what has kept you from God – your slavery to sin, your fear of dying, your brokenness and your sorrow are gone. You are free, again, to be human as God intends you to be.”

This is an especially important message for our catechumens tonight who will in a very few moments enter the saving waters of baptism and experience the rich gift of Christ’s Shalom.

It is likewise an exciting message for our candidates tonight whose faith journey has brought them to this moment of discovering a new fullness of spiritual life in their profession of faith and their being anointed with the Holy Spirit.

And it is again a hope-filled message for all of us who have completed this Lenten Season with mind and heart cleansed, renewed and recommitted to doing good, to pursuing truth and to bearing witness to Christ's love in us.

B.) And here is where the next four words of the Master provide confidence for all of our hearts: "Do not be afraid."

Do not be afraid of the criticism of the world.

Do not be afraid of the scorn of the unbeliever.

Do not be afraid of your own weakness and frailty of character.

Do not even be afraid of the humanity and vulnerability of the Church.

Do not be afraid because the Shalom of Jesus is with, in and working through you. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus and on the incredible mosaic of saving love that he has created from the life-giving Scriptures which have been proclaimed in your hearing tonight.

Peace be with you, do not be afraid.