



CATHEDRAL *of the* INCARNATION

The Great Vigil of Easter, *Year A*, April 9, 2020

During the Coronavirus Crisis. The observance of the Vigil from individual homes. No gathering.

The Rt. Rev. Lawrence C. Provenzano, Bishop of Long Island

Do not be afraid; I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said.

Matthew 28:5

Sisters and brothers in Christ this night we gather, apart from each other to observe this holy night. Our experience of gathering in the safety of our own, individual homes provides us a glimpse into something of the experience of our ancestors. Early Christians gathered in the security of secret places, away from public view - the vigil of Easter was celebrated in the catacombs and secret places for fear of the danger around them.

Tonight, this vigil, has that very feeling. There is danger around us, not of persecution and reprisal, but of a virus that is carrying illness and death in our communities. Just as our ancestors in faith, we tonight celebrate the reality of life in the face of danger and death.

In the midst of isolation and fear we have come together to proclaim Alleluia! For we have come looking for Jesus - and we have found him raised as he said.

During the past few weeks, on television, social media, in emails and texts, people have been repeating, “everything is going to be alright.” There is an assurance, a hope, that everything is going to be alright. For you and me who have come to celebrate this great vigil of Easter, we can be certain that everything is going to be alright. We come to this night knowing that at a

point in time, in the history of God's people, God broke through darkness, sin, despair, fear and death, and in the resurrection of Jesus Christ made everything all right.

Do not be afraid; I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been risen, as he said.

You are aware, I am sure, that our faith and knowledge does not erase our human emotions. During the past few weeks I must admit to each of you, that there have been some real moments of fear in me, that I have contemplated my own mortality. Given the random nature of the virus, and all the varying predictors of who is susceptible, I have worried about having contracted the virus, what it would mean for me, my family and the diocese at large. Like many of you, I have allowed myself to imagine what if? What if I became ill? What if I had to be hospitalized, what if I needed a ventilator, what if I was to die?

Tonight, our inner belief emerges from the tomb of our shared experiences of fear, questioning, and even death - we proclaim together LIFE, real forever LIFE in the Risen Christ. We are reminded tonight, like I have reminded myself each day these several weeks - that in baptism we died with Christ, and death has no hold on us. Through our baptism we rise with Christ to eternal life.

So tonight, I ask you to join me, as we proclaim light in the midst of the darkness. Join me, as we proclaim strength and wholeness in the midst of weakness and sin. Join me, as we proclaim confidence in the promises of Christ in the midst of the incompetence of our present day. We proclaim life - real life through the resurrection of Jesus.

Dear friends in Christ, we opened our liturgy proclaiming that this is the Passover of the Lord. I am reminded that we celebrate this holy night as our

Jewish brothers and sisters are still celebrating Passover. I found myself wishing, in midst of this pandemic, that like the Jews escaping Egypt, recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures, we could merely wipe our door posts with the sacrificial blood, and our homes, children, and loved ones would be spared.

In Jesus, the risen Christ, and sacrificial lamb of God raised from the dead, has given us life over death for good. Our door posts, our homes and our very selves are washed in the resurrection of Jesus we proclaim tonight.

Too often our liturgies and religious practice are imagined as merely ancient acts, historic words mired in remembering only. Tonight, the far reach of God's love and mercy is present in our gatherings. The fear of this time, the anguish and anxiety of loved ones, the deaths we are experiencing in the thousands, are all redeemed and made one with the resurrection of Jesus whose light and life shines in every dark place in our lives today.

Much like all the liturgies of this week, which gave us each a work to carry forward into our lives, the light of Christ, the reality of resurrection now must be carried into the experiences we encounter. Like our ancestors in faith, people are afraid of the danger around us. But the joy of Easter is not merely a story we tell ourselves. It is not merely an historic event embedded in the scriptures to be re-told each year.

Easter has real meaning, those of us who have come to celebrate must now carry it forward - it has consequences, it always has. The life of Christ, the fact of the resurrection, and the church's proclamation that Christ Is Risen, has changed the world for over two thousand years.

It is our time. In the midst of this deadly pandemic - it is our time to live and teach the life of Christ, the fact of the resurrection, and renew the Church's proclamation that Christ Is Risen as he said!