

My brothers and sisters, we have spent these days and weeks walking with the Lord. We have spent forty days in the desert seeking deeper conversion and a more intimate encounter with Christ. We welcomed Him into Jerusalem with the waving of palm branches and shouts of Hosanna. We commemorated His Last Supper with His Apostles and our Lord's gift of the Eucharist. And we venerated the wood of the cross on which hung the salvation of the world. Having journeyed with the Lord, we now stand before the great sign of hope and joy, we stand before the empty tomb. We hear the words first spoken to those holy women by the angel: "Jesus has been raised; He is not here."

This is the central mystery of our faith. If Christ had not been raised from the dead, then all that we have celebrated since Ash Wednesday would be in vain. If Christ had not been raised from the dead, then Jesus Himself would be a fraud, an imposter, a charlatan. But the tomb is empty; Christ has been raised.

In the Resurrection we find the source of our faith and our hope. In the Risen Christ we find our reason to believe that Jesus is Lord, that He has the power to conquer even sin and death. In the Risen Christ, we, too, are offered a share in the Resurrection. Jesus rising from the dead offers us the opportunity to rise above the ancient curse of death.

Now this may seem to be no more than the language of pious devotion, but not for us. For us believers, this share in the Resurrection is made real in a specific and definitive action of Jesus Christ and His Church - in the sacrament of baptism. Through baptism, the Lord fulfills all the signs and wonders that pointed forward to this river of His grace. We heard those signs and wonders in the beautiful readings of this Paschal Vigil. In baptism, the Spirit of God which hovered over the waters comes to us so that we can be restored to the image and likeness of God. In baptism, we pass through the waters to be freed from the curse of original sin, just as the Israelites passed through the Red Sea and so were freed from slavery in Egypt. In baptism, we who are thirsting for God's grace and friendship can come and be satisfied. In baptism, the Lord sprinkles clean water upon us to cleanse us from our impurities.

But most of all, in baptism we die with Christ and are buried with Him. The Fathers of the Church often refer to the baptismal font as a tomb. And as we come up out of the waters of baptism, we are awakened from the tomb of spiritual death; we rise again with Christ. Baptism is our share in the Resurrection. This sacrament washes us from sin, it makes us adopted sons and daughters of God the Most High, and it fills us with the virtues of faith and hope and charity. Baptism is for us the gateway to eternal life in heaven. In our dying and rising with Christ in baptism, we enter into communion with the Blessed Trinity, with God Himself - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In a moment, the beauty of this sacrament will be displayed vividly for all of us as five members of our parish will receive the sacrament of baptism. My dear children who are to be baptized: As I pour water over your heads, know God's great love for you. Today, He makes you His beloved child. And His love will never leave you. Stay close to Him in prayer - pray everyday! Stay close to Him in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist and confession. And stay close to God in the Church. In this way you can be a reminder to all of us of God's great love for all His children.

And for all of you who will be confirmed and receive Holy Communion for the first time, allow these sacraments to be your strength. The world often makes it difficult for us to be faithful disciples of Jesus, but confirmation and the Most Holy Eucharist will give you the graces to follow Christ faithfully. Allow the Holy Spirit to give you the gifts to proclaim the Gospel in all times and place. Allow Jesus in the Eucharist to be your Daily Bread who will strengthen you to live the holiness He calls you to.

My friends, the tomb is empty, the Lord is risen from the dead. As we celebrate these sacraments of Initiation, as we renew the promises of our baptism, let us recommit ourselves to being true disciples of Christ. May our sharing in the of the Resurrection of Christ through baptism increase in us the desire to share also in His holiness.