

Easter Vigil 2024 “Life Has Changed Forever”
Bishop Frank Schuster

Something happened on this holy night. Something happened that changed the universe forever. You see, we all share the same experience of being born into this world in darkness. We try to understand who we are along the way by braille, figuring each step along the way, stumbling along, always wondering at the deepest level why am I here? Why do I exist? We deduce, if I live in a creation, there must be a Creator. The fact I ask these questions in the first place perhaps suggests I was made to? If I seek God, it makes sense that God would be seeking for me. OK, where is he? And then it happens. At some point in our lives a light shines in the darkness of our existence. In time we discover that this light is a Person. His name is Jesus. We come to realize that Jesus isn't just a name that is printed on a page in Sunday School or a historical idea collecting dust, but rather a living Person. Jesus enters into our existence and he shines light on who we are, why we are here and where we are going. In the process, we become conscious of the darkness inside of us, we become acutely aware of our brokenness as an individual and as a race. In time we realize that we cannot save ourselves. Only Jesus can save us. These past few days throughout this holy Triduum we walked with him as he suffered and died for our sins and for the sake of our salvation. Tonight, something remarkable has been revealed to us. My friends, the tomb was empty. The tomb was empty. This is the only reason why Christianity spread the way it did.

You see, the Christian faith is unique from all other religions in that the veracity of what we believe relies solely on a single historical event. The resurrection of Jesus is a historical event worthy of profound wonder. Let's look again at what we witnessed these past few days. The Gospels are all in agreement that the night Jesus was arrested, the disciples fled. This is striking to me because if you want to start a new religion that is not the best propaganda to be putting out there. This must have been obviously true and well known at the time because all four gospels report this. Something happened on this night to convince the disciples to return from hiding in fear to standing in the public square, risking their necks, even giving their lives, to proclaim that Jesus Christ had in fact risen from the dead. Think about that! What made this message even more compelling was, these disciples were not extremists. They were normal people, fishermen, businessmen and such. They had lives they could have gone back to. Further, their message wasn't very political either as they weren't looking to start a war or a revolution. Quite the contrary, they came out of hiding with a message of God's forgiveness, his love for the world and a commandment to love others, even those who persecute us. For centuries, Christians were horribly persecuted and even killed. In some places of the world, this happens even today...even today. Thousands upon thousands of martyrs since the earliest days of the Church gave their lives so to be a witness of Jesus' Gospel. Why did any of them do that?

It boils down to one reason, one moment in history: Jesus in fact rose from the dead and appeared to his disciples. This means God has in fact visited his people. As we await his return in glory, tonight we know in our hearts that he has never left. He is present all around us every day, in the Holy Eucharist and in the people we meet. He is in the heart of all the baptized and he is the light of the world. Our lives do not follow the predictable pattern of the universe, that we are born, we live, we die, and that's it. Because of Jesus, we now know that death is not the end, our lives have direction, our existence has purpose and, as a result, our lives have changed forever.

Life has changed because we must now look upon this world in light of the world to come, the Kingdom of God. This new sight or vision we have has implications on how we live our lives in the here and now. The world is no longer about me but about Jesus who died for my sins and rose for my salvation. We are baptized in this faith and remember our baptismal vows because life is no longer just about being born, living and dying. Life now includes resurrection and everlasting life.

I say this because it is so easy to live our lives spiritually asleep to the implications of this message. This is because, as we ask the deeper questions about our existence, like I mentioned earlier, we also become quite aware of our brokenness. There is a wound deep inside of all of us that we would rather forget. There is a hole inside of us that we fill with all the wrong things. At times, we might even feel hopeless and tempted to despair. We can go through life like that, self-medicating ourselves with destructive behavior, always unsatisfied by the answers given to us by popular culture. And then, it happens. We find Jesus. We discover he is not just print on a page. Jesus is a living person, living now. All we need to do is open our hearts to him.

My friends, seek the Lord for he is seeking you. Know the Lord for he knows you better. Love the Lord for he loved you first. Follow the Lord, and you will find salvation. Live in the Lord for our discipleship has implications on how to see, think and act that stand in contrast to those who do not understand our Easter faith. We live in this world, but we do not belong to it. We are no longer lost for we have been found. We have been visited by our Creator and found him to be our savior. You know his name. His name is Jesus. He is the light of life. He is Christ and Lord. And, he has risen. Alleluia!