

HOMILY

The Easter Vigil

April 7, 2007 – 8:30 PM Liturgy
Rev. Andrew A. Czajkowski
St. John the Evangelist Parish
Davison, Michigan

A student from Korea was complaining how difficult it is to learn the English language. He felt that American idioms were particularly difficult to comprehend. He said that he had studied English for nine years in preparation for attending the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. On his first day at the school, as he was walking across campus, an American student casually greeted him, “Hi, what’s the good word?” The young Korean student stopped dead in his tracks. He thought to himself: “I don’t know the good word! You would have thought that after nine years of studying English, someone would have told me what the ‘good word’ was!”

Later, trying to solve this puzzle, he decided to turn the tables and ask an American, “What’s the good word?” and listen to his reply. So, approaching a fellow student, he repeated, “Hi! What’s the good word?” The quick response was, “Oh, not much. How about you?”

It was obvious that none of these students knew what the good word was. It’s a rather empty greeting. But I can tell you about the good word today – ***CHRIST THE LORD IS RISEN!*** And not only is it the good word, it’s the best good news that this world has ever received.

So what does the good word say? At Easter, God raised Jesus from the dead. Easter is the ultimate act of God. No human being can achieve immortality on their own. Many people have tried, but it cannot be done. It’s like the story about a man who was observed running toward a large river. As he reached the dock, he increased his speed and when he came to the end, he threw himself as high and as far as he could before hitting the water, landing about ten feet from the dock. As soon as he surfaced, he swam back to the land and tried it again, over and over again. An onlooker asked him, “What are you doing?” He said, “A friend of mine has bet me a million dollars that I can’t jump across the river, and after thinking over those odds, I couldn’t help at least trying.”

So it is with those who would defeat death on their own. No one can work their way to immortality; no one can will it or even merit it. Only one way does a person who is truly dead come back to life—by an act of God.

We might compare our human struggle to that of a person pushing against a huge stone—a stone like the one that blocked the entrance to Jesus' tomb. We have all been pushing against something for a long time, and we push hard. Maybe we've been pushing against a supervisor who is hard to satisfy, or against the threat of having our job downsized. Or maybe we're pushing against a marriage that seems destined for the ditch. Or maybe pushing against chronic pain, against depression, weight gain, against loneliness and grief, or against some other obstacle that is between us and our dream. Lately, many of us have been pushing against the anxiety that terrorists will strike again.

We work so hard to save our lives. We push and push and push and in the end, in one of the worst ironies of life, it seems that all that waits on the other side is death. But then we come into this room on Easter Sunday morning and we realize that the stone we have been pushing against has been rolled away—the stone of our mortality, the stone of our inadequacy, the stone of our impurity. God has acted on our behalf and suddenly we have a new picture of our lives. That supervisor will not get the best of us. The loss of a job will not destroy us. Neither will the loss of marriage, the loss of a dream, or even our failing health. These tragedies that come to us do not have the power to destroy us because, in Easter, God says to us that there is nothing in this world or the next that will forever defeat one of my children. Yes, Easter is an act of God. And he has acted on our behalf.

One further thought. Easter is a summons to grateful living. St. Augustine, who had a powerful conversion experience in his life, says every Christian is called to be an alleluia from head to foot. Now it is our turn to live as Easter people, to let our lives say, "Yes!" to the people we meet each day.

Eugene Smith was a minister who never sang much because he didn't have much of a voice and couldn't read music. But one year on Easter Sunday, his daughter persuaded him to sing along with the choir when it came time for the "Hallelujah Chorus." And he really got caught up in the last part when they were singing all those hallelujahs. He said that as they were singing, he got carried away. He loved to sing those hallelujahs and he was just about to sing a couple more when all of a

sudden the choir stopped, the director stopped, and the organ stopped. He said that they stopped too soon. He said, “Since that time I’ve been going around with a couple of hallelujahs inside of me just waiting to get out.” What a way to live! What a way to die—with hallelujahs just waiting to get out!

So, should someone ask you “What’s the good word?” don’t just say “Oh, nothing much.” Say, “**CHRIST IS RISEN!**” Christ is truly alive and so are we!