

PRAYING LENT

From the *Online Ministries*, CREIGHTON UNIVERSITY

Preparing for the Easter Vigil

Darkness

The Easter Vigil begins with darkness. The darkness itself is the first movement of the liturgy, so we begin our preparations with that darkness. It represents all darkness, and all the meanings of darkness - devoid of light; evil thoughts, motivations, deeds; all that is hidden and secret, deceitful and dishonest, divisive and abusive, immoral and sinful. It's the darkness of our world, and the darkness in my heart. If I come to the vigil and restlessly and impatiently fidget in the dark "until something happens," I miss the power of what is about to happen. So, we prepare by readying ourselves to experience the darkness. It is distasteful and reprehensible, embarrassing and humbling, fearful and despairing.

Then a light is struck. It breaks into the darkness.

"Make this new fire holy, and inflame us with new hope."

"May the light of Christ, rising in glory, dispel the darkness of our hearts and minds."

The Light of Christ

The candle lit from the new fire is then processed into the community, and we receive its light and experience the power of that light as it grows. When the candle is brought front and center, we hear the Easter Proclamation, or Exultet. [It can be found in the Online Ministries at: www.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/Lent/exultet.html]

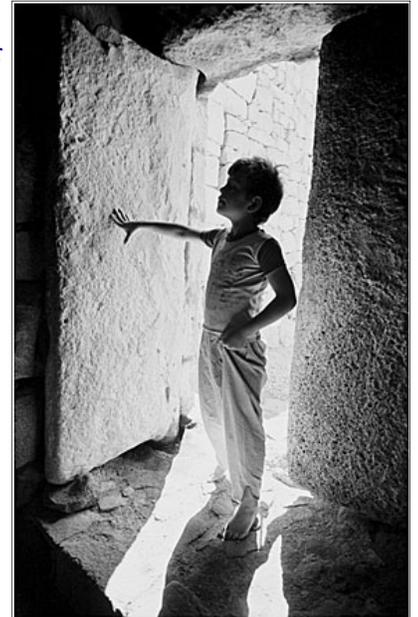
Nine readings and eight psalms help us with our night's vigil. "The reading of the word of God is the fundamental element of the Easter Vigil."

This prayer sounds like a Eucharistic Prayer. We give thanks and praise over this symbol of the Light of Christ in our midst and "consecrate" it as Christ's presence among us. Reading this proclamation carefully and letting its joyful song into our hearts is a wonderful way to prepare to feel its exultant praise at the Vigil.

"Dear friends in Christ, we have begun our solemn vigil. Let us now listen attentively to the word of God, recalling how God saved his people throughout history and, in the fullness of time, sent his own Son to be our Redeemer."

The Word of Our Salvation History

There are nine readings and eight psalms or songs that have been prepared to help us with our night's vigil. Each reading is followed by an invitation to pray in silence, which is followed by a special prayer designed for that reading. (The help that comes with the liturgy says this: "The number of readings from the Old Testament may be reduced for pastoral reasons, but it must always be borne in mind that the reading of the word of God is the fundamental element of the Easter Vigil.") If we have time on Saturday, a wonderful way to prepare for the Vigil would be to read the readings and psalms and then articulate prayer to the Lord, expressing gratitude to God for an extraordinary story of fidelity and love for us.



After the last reading from the Old Testament, the candles are lit and the bells ring as we sing our *Glory to God*. Now we are ready to hear the New Testament word in the light of Christ, and the good news, "He has been raised!" Powerful religious experience is prepared for. At this point in the liturgy, we want to be prepared to be exultant with joy at the resurrection of Jesus - the victory of our God over sin and death - for us.

The Liturgy of Baptism

The Presiders and ministers go to the font of baptism, thereby drawing us together there. (The ritual says that if the font can't be

Visit the *Online Ministries* site: *Praying Lent*.

In addition to this resource for Lent, there are many others to support our journey through Lent. And, there is a **Lenten Daily Prayer** for each day of Lent and Easter Week.

Onlineministries.CollaborativeMinistry/online.html

seen by the congregation, then "water is placed in the sanctuary.") Those who are to be baptized are called forward, along with their sponsors. In our excitement for them, we realize that this is very much about the renewal of our whole community. Initiation and revitalization become one this night.

"Dear friends in Christ, as our brothers and sisters approach the waters of rebirth, let us help them by our prayers and ask God, our almighty Father, to support them with his mercy and love."

The Litany

We turn to the community of saints in glory to ask for their help. We remember that we do this same litany before the ordination of priests. As we turn to each of these saints we recall how these very special women and men journeyed in situations very much like ours and let God transform their lives, and that they are now in glory interceding for us. In our hearts we might also turn to the saints we have known, who are not part of this list, whose love we have known and to whom we can turn tonight to intercede for these candidates for baptism and for our whole community.

"Give new life to these chosen ones by the grace of baptism."

The Blessing of the Water

The Presider now blesses the water. These wonderful prayers are like a mini lesson, both for those about to be baptized, and for us. We can prepare by praying this prayer before the Vigil, at the link to the right. When the priest inserts the candle in the water and pull it out and lifts it up, we experience the ritual that announces the meaning of our baptism into these waters - one with him in dying that we might be one with him in rising.

All the power of this night's rituals and sacraments, lead us to celebrate the Eucharist, to "give thanks and praise."

The Profession of Faith and Renunciation of Evil

We have renewed our baptismal promises many times. We can prepare to make the Easter Vigil a powerful experience of grace if we make each of the renunciations and professions with a meaning that is personal to us.

"Do you reject sin, so as to live in the freedom of God's children?"

That question begs me to spontaneously say, "YES! Of course!" But, reflection tells me that I long to be free at the same time that I cling to some of my unfreedoms. So the next question takes me deeper.

"Do you reject the glamour of evil, and refuse to be mastered by sin?"

There really is a glamour to evil and it does claim a mastery over me. The renunciation that is asked of me is about freedom, so I am asked if I will personally choose to be free and reject the rules the sin and darkness.

"Do you reject Satan, father of sin and prince of darkness?"

Now I am ready to profess the faith of the Church, choosing to believe in the One who gives me life.

Baptism and the Rites Explaining Baptism

The candidates are baptized. Even if our church isn't able to immerse the baptized into the water, the ritual of pouring water over their heads is meant to be a sign of their entry into the waters of baptism. We should feel the power of this moment and open our hearts to its joy, for them and for ourselves.

The newly baptized are anointed, with the same oil used to anoint priests.

"He now anoints you with the chrism of salvation, so that, united with his people, you may remain forever a member of Christ who is Priest, Prophet, and King."

They are then clothed in a white garment.

"You have become a new creation and have clothed yourselves in Christ. Receive this baptismal garment and bring it unstained to the judgment seat of our Lord Jesus Christ, so that you may have everlasting life."

Finally, they receive a candle lit from the Easter fire.

"You have been enlightened by Christ. Walk always as children of the light and keep the flame of faith alive in your hearts. When the Lord comes, may you go out to meet him with all the saints in the heavenly kingdom."

The Celebration of Confirmation

The newly baptized and those who are about to be received into full communion are ready to "share in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit." We all pray in silence, and feel the power of God's Spirit among us. And in silence, the Presider lays hands on each person, the same sign used in ordination to the priesthood. As they are anointed, we can imagine the gifts of the Spirit that we have received and can let ourselves feel the grace offered us to be strong witnesses to the union with Jesus in mission that we are offered. The newly confirmed take their places in the assembly of the faithful, ready to join us for the first time at the table of the Lord.

The Eucharist

All our preparations, all the power of this night's rituals and sacraments, lead us to celebrate the Eucharist, to "give God thanks and praise." As the newly confirmed receive the final Sacrament of Initiation, the Body and Blood of Jesus, we are ready to celebrate Easter.

The tomb is empty. There is Light in the midst of our darkness. We've been fed by the Word and given new life in the waters of baptism. Now we eat his Body and drink his Blood and receive the life in him that he promises.

Alleluia, Alleluia!