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Homily at Easter Vigil Mass

The complete text of Pope Francis' homily at the Easter Vigil Mass in St. Peter's: the Risen Jesus "will give you the peace you are looking for and the strength to live as he would have you do."

04/02/2013

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. In the Gospel of this radiant night of the Easter Vigil, we first meet the women who go the tomb of Jesus

with spices to anoint his body (cf. Lk 24:1-3). They go to perform an act of compassion, a traditional act of affection and love for a dear departed person, just as we would. They had followed Jesus, they had listened to his words, they had felt understood by him in their dignity and they had accompanied him to the very end, to Calvary and to the moment when he was taken down from the cross. We can imagine their feelings as they make their way to the tomb: a certain sadness, sorrow that Jesus had left them, he had died, his life had come to an end. Life would now go on as before. Yet the women continued to feel love, the love for Jesus which now led them to his tomb. But at this point, something completely new and unexpected happens, something which upsets their hearts and their plans, something which will upset their whole life: they see the stone removed from before the tomb, they

draw near and they do not find the Lord's body. It is an event which leaves them perplexed, hesitant, full of questions: "What happened?", "What is the meaning of all this?" (cf. Lk 24:4). Doesn't the same thing also happen to us when something completely new occurs in our everyday life? We stop short, we don't understand, we don't know what to do. Newness often makes us fearful, including the newness which God brings us, the newness which God asks of us. We are like the Apostles in the Gospel: often we would prefer to hold on to our own security, to stand in front of a tomb, to think about someone who has died, someone who ultimately lives on only as a memory, like the great historical figures from the past. We are afraid of God's surprises; we are afraid of God's surprises! He always surprises us!

Dear brothers and sisters, let us not be closed to the newness that God wants to bring into our lives! Are we often weary, disheartened and sad? Do we feel weighed down by our sins? Do we think that we won't be able to cope? Let us not close our hearts, let us not lose confidence, let us never give up: there are no situations which God cannot change, there is no sin which he cannot forgive if only we open ourselves to him.

2. But let us return to the Gospel, to the women, and take one step further. They find the tomb empty, the body of Jesus is not there, something new has happened, but all this still doesn't tell them anything certain: it raises questions; it leaves them confused, without offering an answer. And suddenly there are two men in dazzling clothes who say: "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; but

has risen” (Lk 24:5-6). What was a simple act, done surely out of love – going to the tomb – has now turned into an event, a truly life-changing event. Nothing remains as it was before, not only in the lives of those women, but also in our own lives and in the history of mankind. Jesus is not dead, he has risen, he is alive! He does not simply return to life; rather, he is life itself, because he is the Son of God, the living God (cf. Num 14:21-28; Deut 5:26; Josh 3:10). Jesus no longer belongs to the past, but lives in the present and is projected towards the future; he is the everlasting “today” of God. This is how the newness of God appears to the women, the disciples and all of us: as victory over sin, evil and death, over everything that crushes life and makes it seem less human. And this is a message meant for me and for you, dear sister, dear brother. How often does Love have to tell us: Why do you look for the

living among the dead? Our daily problems and worries can wrap us up in ourselves, in sadness and bitterness... and that is where death is. That is not the place to look for the One who is alive!

Let the risen Jesus enter your life, welcome him as a friend, with trust: he is life! If up till now you have kept him at a distance, step forward. He will receive you with open arms. If you have been indifferent, take a risk: you won't be disappointed. If following him seems difficult, don't be afraid, trust him, be confident that he is close to you, he is with you and he will give you the peace you are looking for and the strength to live as he would have you do.

3. There is one last little element that I would like to emphasize in the Gospel for this Easter Vigil. The women encounter the newness of God. Jesus has risen, he is alive! But

faced with empty tomb and the two men in brilliant clothes, their first reaction is one of fear: “they were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground,” Saint Luke tells us — they didn’t even have courage to look. But when they hear the message of the Resurrection, they accept it in faith. And the two men in dazzling clothes tell them something of crucial importance: “Remember what he told you when he was still in Galilee... And they remembered his words” (Lk 24:6,8). They are asked to remember their encounter with Jesus, to remember his words, his actions, his life; and it is precisely this loving remembrance of their experience with the Master that enables the women to master their fear and to bring the message of the Resurrection to the Apostles and all the others (cf. Lk 24:9). To remember what God has done and continues to do for me, for us, to remember the road we have travelled; this is what

opens our hearts to hope for the future. May we learn to remember everything that God has done in our lives.

On this radiant night, let us invoke the intercession of the Virgin Mary, who treasured all these events in her heart (cf. Lk 2:19,51) and ask the Lord to give us a share in his Resurrection. May he open us to the newness that transforms. May he make us men and women capable of remembering all that he has done in our own lives and in the history of our world. May he help us to feel his presence as the one who is alive and at work in our midst. And may he teach us each day not to look among the dead for the Living One. Amen.

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