

## From the desk of Fr. Jim

### CHRIST'S DEATH DESTROYED THE HERITAGE OF SIN

Pope John Paul II, Servant of God

March 29, 1986

*During the Easter Vigil celebration on the night of Holy Saturday, 29 March, the Holy Father delivered the following homily.*

**1. *O mors-ero mors tua!***

*("O death-I will be your death!")*

On this night, the Church returns to the place of Christ's death and burial. On Good Friday, the day before the Sabbath, Jesus' body was taken down from the Cross and placed in the tomb. Prior to this, the Roman centurion had pierced Jesus' side with a lance, in order to ascertain that he was really dead. The body was then hurriedly placed in the tomb, because the day of preparation for the Passover was drawing to a close. Today, the Church once again goes to the burial place and, next to the closed tomb of the Crucified, celebrates the Easter Vigil.

**2.** A vigil signifies a time of anticipation. The Church goes to Christ's tomb with the awareness of the death that this tomb represents. She goes with the certainty that Jesus of Nazareth has truly died! At the same time, during this vigil, she reads once again the Gospel account of Easter morning. Today it is the Gospel according to Luke. In this way, the Church's vigil is the Easter Vigil. In the course of this holy night—thanks to Christ, crucified and placed in the tomb—death will be vanquished by Death: *mors, ero mors tua*.

**3.** Thus says he who is our Pasch. Pasch means "passage". It refers to the passage into life through death, just as, under the Old Covenant, Israel once passed into life through the death of the paschal lamb. Yet, that was only a passage into another life upon this earth: from the slavery of Egypt into the freedom of the promised land. The Church's Pasch signifies the passage into the eternal life that comes from God, and that is life in God. No promised land in this world can guarantee such freedom, such life...

**4.** Yet the Pasch of Christ was fulfilled upon this earth. On this earth, death was destroyed by death. On this earth, Christ was crucified and placed in the tomb, and at dawn, *"the day after the Sabbath"* (that is, Sunday), the tomb was found empty.

**5.** The first cause of death is sin. All the tombs scattered across the face of the earth speak of the death of successive human generations. All the tombs around the globe witness to sin, to the heritage of sin in man. In the paschal mystery, Christ passed from death to life. This means that he destroyed the heritage of sin at its roots through his obedience unto death. Thus, Christ's Pasch also signifies passage through the history of mankind's sin from the very beginning: even from, that beginning where

*"by one man's disobedience many were made sinners" (Rom 5:19).*

6. It is for this reason that the Church professes:

*"he was crucified, died and was buried-he descended into hell on the third day he rose again".*

Before rising again, he touched with his death man's sin in all the generations of those who have died. He visited them with the power of his death: with the redemptive power of his death; with the life giving power of his death. ***O mors ero Mors tua!***

7. And we, too, who live upon this earth, we who today by participation in the Easter Vigil, have been *"buried into his death"*, as St. Paul writes (cf. **Rom 6:3**).

Christ's death, the redemptive death, the life-giving death, has destroyed the heritage of sin that is in each of us. In fact we *"have been baptized into Christ Jesus"* (**Rom 6:3**).

There is more:

*"We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life"* (**Rom 6:4**).

8. It is in this spirit that we are gathered here. In this spirit we participate in the Easter Vigil together with the whole Church: together with all our brothers and sisters in the faith, wherever they stand watch in this holy night, near the tomb of Christ's Death and Resurrection. And in this spirit I greet in an especially warm way the catechumens who will receive the sacrament of Baptism during this Easter Vigil liturgy. They number thirty-nine, and have come from Korea (the largest group-15), Japan, Cameroon, Tanzania, Zaire, the Ivory Coast, Cape Verde, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Italy, the United States and Germany. We rejoice with them, because they will be touched by the salvific power of Christ's death, because, "buried with him in death, as Christ was raised from the dead, so they too might walk in newness of life".

9. He *"was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father"*. By the glory of the Father: in fact, the Father is God of the living, not of the dead (cf. **Mt 22:32**). He is "a lover of life". The women who go to the tomb at dawn will hear these words:

*"Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen"* (**Lk 24:5-6**).

He has risen "by the glory of the Father.

All of the Father's glory is in the Son, who is risen: in death he has vanquished death: ***mors-ero mors tua!***