

Easter Vigil
4/16/2022

A EUCATASTROPHE

This was the end. Everything was lost and their world was awash with shock and sorrow. This was a catastrophe—which literally means an overthrowing—of their hopes, their dreams, their faith and the longings of their hearts. Those women didn't set out to the tomb joyfully recalling Jesus' words about the resurrection. They were going to anoint a corpse.

J.R.R. Tolkien, who was a devout convert to the Catholic faith and attended daily Mass, is most famous for his work, *The Lord of the Rings*. The culmination of *The Lord of the Rings* shows evil on the verge of triumph, and a terrible catastrophe. Then the ring is destroyed and not only is catastrophe avoided but evil is overthrown as goodness triumphs.

Tolkien invented a word to describe all this. He called it a eucatastrophe. The word, *eucharist*, means good thanks and a eucatastrophe literally means a good catastrophe, a good overthrowing. Tolkien described it as *a massive turn from a seemingly unconquerable situation*. Although the climax of *The Lord of the Rings* reveals a eucatastrophe, in one of his letters, Tolkien insisted that, *the Resurrection was the greatest 'eucatastrophe' possible*.

What we celebrate tonight is the greatest overturning, the greatest eucatastrophe. The catastrophe of Jesus' death becomes the eucatastrophe of his resurrection. The unconquerable situation of Jesus' death is overthrown or has been said, *Love has penetrated the realm of death*.

These three days of the sacred triduum recall the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ—the movement from life through death into new life that Jesus pioneers and in which we all follow. The shock and sorrow of his death are transformed into the joy and hope of his resurrection. The resurrection is always about hope. It means that even, in difficult circumstances or unconquerable situations, we are to be a people of hope and even joy.

Those women had forgotten. The angel spoke to them a very important word: *remember*. Remember his words, remember the resurrection, sometimes we can experience an amnesia of the heart, an amnesia of the soul when we forget Jesus' words, when we forget the resurrection. It says, *and they remembered his words*. Their mourning would be turned into joy and they would be transformed from mourners into messengers of the resurrection.

Life was different for them after that and it's different for us as well. Because of this night, we now look at life differently, we look at death differently. We look at them both through the lens of Jesus' death and resurrection.

But the Paschal Mystery isn't just some event from the past that we remember. It's a mystery that we enter into and live. We enter into it by baptism. St. Paul tells us that when we're baptized into Christ Jesus, we baptized into his death so that we might share in his resurrection. In baptism, we're grafted onto Jesus' dying and rising. We're not crucified and yet we now share in the new life that Jesus brings us. It's as if Jesus is carrying us on his back across a stream. He gets us to the other side without us getting wet.

Soon our elect will approach the waters of the baptismal font, the womb of the Church. They will share in the dying and rising of Jesus, in his Paschal Mystery. Just as the Israelites left the slavery of Egypt passing through the waters of the Red Sea, so too in baptism, we leave the slavery of sin passing through those baptismal waters to the freedom of the children of God.

They come to the water but we are no idle spectators tonight. After their baptism, all of us who are already baptized, will renew our own baptismal commitment. We have spent the forty days of Lent as a type of retreat where through prayer, fasting and almsgiving we prepare to renew our baptismal promises.

Next, our candidates, already one with us in baptism will make a profession of the Catholic Faith entering into full communion with the Catholic Church. Then they and the newly baptized will receive an outpouring of the Holy Spirit through the Sacrament of Confirmation.

After the Israelites passed through the Red Sea, they entered into the land where they were nourished, with manna, the bread from heaven. So too, our new

members will join us in the banquet of Christ's Sacrifice, in sharing in the Body and Blood of Christ, the true bread from heaven as they make their First Communion. Every time we share in the Eucharist, we renew our covenant relationship with God, our sharing in the Paschal Mystery.

These people have spent many months learning, studying praying and growing in faith and sometimes people doing this aying a price we have never had to pay. Tonight their story, their history is more intimately connected to the story of Jesus' death and resurrection. But although they have been students, tonight they become teachers, our teachers. They see the great gift, the treasure we have in our Catholic faith. What we have they want to share in and in all that they teach us. They teach us not to take our faith for granted. They teach us to value the treasure that we have.

This night marks the rebirth of hope as we remember that even death, even our own death, can be transformed into new life. And Jesus calls us to share in his passing over from death to new life and through him sin and death can be overthrown. He calls us to live of intentional faith. Jesus didn't suffer, die and rise so that we could lives of hit and miss faith, or cultural faith but rather lives of intentional friendship with him, lives of intentional faith in every *little way*. Lives where our faith in the risen Christ is the rudder guiding the ship of our own lives and where our history is intimately connected to his.

The women set out in sorrow thinking it was the end but instead it was the beginning. The catastrophe they faced became a eucatastrophe, a good overthrowing, an overthrowing of sin and death.

Tolkien was right, the Resurrection was the greatest *'eucatastrophe'* possible. May that eucatastrophe, may Jesus' Paschal Mystery makes us a people of hope and a people of joy.