

# Easter Vigil

The Easter Vigil is the first celebration of the Resurrection and traditionally occurs after sunset on Holy Saturday and before sunrise on Easter Sunday. The service celebrates the steady light of Christ that has entered the world. Through the lighting of candles, the exclamation of the Exultet, and meditations on God's faithful love throughout history, we are drawn into the empty tomb and made witnesses of the Risen Lord.

This service has three parts, The Solemn Beginning, The Liturgy of the Word, and the Renewal of Baptismal Promises. At many parishes the beginning of the celebration takes place outside around a fire. From the fire the Paschal Candle is lit and blessed. Depending upon the resources available in the home, it may be best to have a single candle, preferably a larger taper or pillar candle, from which smaller candles may be lit. If these resources are not available, simply invite those gathered to pray with the image of the Light of Christ, a single flame from which all other flames are lit.

The Exultet is an ancient and beautiful hymn that traces all of Salvation History. You may wish to sing or recite the Exultet or you might listen to a recorded version. It is quite beautiful, especially when sung.

For families with small children, this service can be adjusted. You might focus on the Gospel reading and lead your children through a meditation on the light of Christ and pray for that light to enter your home and fill your hearts.

**Things you might need:** candles, a bowl of water and a leafy branch from outside, a playlist of songs

**Songs you might sing or listen to:** [Exultet](#), [Give me Jesus](#), [Jesus Christ is Risen Today](#), [Death in His Grave](#), [Set a Fire](#)

## **The Solemn Beginning of the Vigil**

*Leader:* In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Dear brothers and sisters,  
on this most sacred night,  
in which our Lord Jesus Christ  
passed over from death to life,  
the Church calls upon her sons and daughters,  
scattered throughout the world,  
to come together to watch and pray.  
If we keep the memorial  
of the Lord's paschal solemnity in this way,  
listening to his word and celebrating his mysteries,  
then we shall have the sure hope  
of sharing his triumph over death  
and living with him in God.

*Pause for a moment of silence*

**All:** May the light of Christ rising in glory  
dispel the darkness of our hearts and minds.

### **Exultet**

*Invite those gathered to sit with the words as a meditation for prayer  
and to light their candle off the center candle during the Exultet.*

Exult, let them exult, the hosts of heaven,  
exult, let Angel ministers of God exult,  
let the trumpet of salvation  
sound aloud our mighty King's triumph!  
Be glad, let earth be glad, as glory floods her,  
ablaze with light from her eternal King,  
let all corners of the earth be glad,

knowing an end to gloom and darkness.  
Rejoice, let Mother Church also rejoice,  
arrayed with the lightning of his glory,  
let this holy building shake with joy,  
filled with the mighty voices of the peoples.

It is truly right and just,  
with ardent love of mind and heart  
and with devoted service of our voice,  
to acclaim our God invisible, the almighty Father,  
and Jesus Christ, our Lord, his Son, his Only Begotten.

Who for our sake paid Adam's debt to the eternal Father,  
and, pouring out his own dear Blood,  
wiped clean the record of our ancient sinfulness.

These, then, are the feasts of Passover,  
in which is slain the Lamb, the one true Lamb,  
whose Blood anoints the doorposts of believers.

This is the night,  
when once you led our forebears, Israel's children,  
from slavery in Egypt  
and made them pass dry-shod through the Red Sea.

This is the night  
that with a pillar of fire  
banished the darkness of sin.

This is the night  
that even now, throughout the world,  
sets Christian believers apart from worldly vices  
and from the gloom of sin,  
leading them to grace  
and joining them to his holy ones.

This is the night,  
when Christ broke the prison-bars of death  
and rose victorious from the underworld.

Our birth would have been no gain,  
had we not been redeemed.  
O wonder of your humble care for us!  
O love, O charity beyond all telling,  
to ransom a slave you gave away your Son!

O truly necessary sin of Adam,  
destroyed completely by the Death of Christ!

O happy fault  
that earned so great, so glorious a Redeemer!

O truly blessed night,  
worthy alone to know the time and hour  
when Christ rose from the underworld!

This is the night  
of which it is written:  
The night shall be as bright as day,  
dazzling is the night for me,  
and full of gladness.

The sanctifying power of this night  
dispels wickedness, washes faults away,  
restores innocence to the fallen, and joy to mourners,  
drives out hatred, fosters concord, and brings down the mighty.

On this, your night of grace, O holy Father,  
accept this candle, a solemn offering,  
the work of bees and of your servants' hands,

an evening sacrifice of praise,  
this gift from your most holy Church.

But now we know the praises of this pillar,  
which glowing fire ignites for God's honor,  
a fire into many flames divided,  
yet never dimmed by sharing of its light,  
for it is fed by melting wax,  
drawn out by mother bees  
to build a torch so precious.

O truly blessed night,  
when things of heaven are wed to those of earth,  
and divine to the human.

Therefore, O Lord,  
we pray you that this candle,  
hallowed to the honor of your name,  
may persevere undimmed,  
to overcome the darkness of this night.  
Receive it as a pleasing fragrance,  
and let it mingle with the lights of heaven.  
May this flame be found still burning  
by the Morning Star:  
the one Morning Star who never sets,  
Christ your Son,  
who, coming back from death's domain,  
has shed his peaceful light on humanity,  
and lives and reigns for ever and ever.  
**All:** Amen.

## **Liturgy of the Word**

*Nine readings are provided for the vigil. In some parishes all nine readings are read, and in others the readings are reduced. Three readings are included here, but the others may be found by following [this link to the USCCB website](#).*

### **First Reading** (Exodus 14:15-15:1)

A reading from the Book of Exodus:

The LORD said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me?  
Tell the Israelites to go forward.  
And you, lift up your staff and, with hand outstretched over the sea,  
split the sea in two,  
that the Israelites may pass through it on dry land.  
But I will make the Egyptians so obstinate  
that they will go in after them.  
Then I will receive glory through Pharaoh and all his army,  
his chariots and charioteers.  
The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD,  
when I receive glory through Pharaoh  
and his chariots and charioteers."

The angel of God, who had been leading Israel's camp,  
now moved and went around behind them.  
The column of cloud also, leaving the front,  
took up its place behind them,  
so that it came between the camp of the Egyptians  
and that of Israel.  
But the cloud now became dark, and thus the night passed  
without the rival camps coming any closer together  
all night long.  
Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea,  
and the LORD swept the sea  
with a strong east wind throughout the night

and so turned it into dry land.

When the water was thus divided,  
the Israelites marched into the midst of the sea on dry land,  
with the water like a wall to their right and to their left.

The Egyptians followed in pursuit;  
all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and charioteers went after them  
right into the midst of the sea.

In the night watch just before dawn  
the LORD cast through the column of the fiery cloud  
upon the Egyptian force a glance that threw it into a panic;  
and he so clogged their chariot wheels  
that they could hardly drive.

With that the Egyptians sounded the retreat before Israel,  
because the LORD was fighting for them against the Egyptians.

Then the LORD told Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea,  
that the water may flow back upon the Egyptians,  
upon their chariots and their charioteers."

So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea,  
and at dawn the sea flowed back to its normal depth.

The Egyptians were fleeing head on toward the sea,  
when the LORD hurled them into its midst.

As the water flowed back,  
it covered the chariots and the charioteers of Pharaoh's whole army  
which had followed the Israelites into the sea.

Not a single one of them escaped.

But the Israelites had marched on dry land  
through the midst of the sea,  
with the water like a wall to their right and to their left.

Thus the LORD saved Israel on that day  
from the power of the Egyptians.

When Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the seashore  
and beheld the great power that the LORD  
had shown against the Egyptians,

they feared the LORD and believed in him and in his servant Moses.

Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD:  
I will sing to the LORD, for he is gloriously triumphant;  
horse and chariot he has cast into the sea.

The Word of the Lord  
**All:** Thanks be to God.

### **Responsorial Psalm** (Exodus 15)

*Reader:* Let us sing to the Lord; he has covered himself in glory.  
**All:** Let us sing to the Lord; he has covered himself in glory.

I will sing to the LORD, for he is gloriously triumphant;  
horse and chariot he has cast into the sea.  
My strength and my courage is the LORD,  
and he has been my savior.  
He is my God, I praise him;  
the God of my father, I extol him.

**All:** Let us sing to the Lord; he has covered himself in glory.

The LORD is a warrior,  
LORD is his name!  
Pharaoh's chariots and army he hurled into the sea;  
the elite of his officers were submerged in the Red Sea.

**All:** Let us sing to the Lord; he has covered himself in glory.

The flood waters covered them,  
they sank into the depths like a stone.  
Your right hand, O LORD, magnificent in power,  
your right hand, O LORD, has shattered the enemy.

**All:** Let us sing to the Lord; he has covered himself in glory.

You brought in the people you redeemed  
and planted them on the mountain of your inheritance  
the place where you made your seat, O LORD,  
the sanctuary, LORD, which your hands established.  
The LORD shall reign forever and ever.

**All:** Let us sing to the Lord; he has covered himself in glory.

### **Collect**

*Leader:* Let us pray.

O God, who make this most sacred night radiant  
with the glory of the Lord's Resurrection,  
stir up in your Church a spirit of adoption,  
so that, renewed in body and mind,  
we may render you undivided service.  
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.

**All:** Amen.

### **Second Reading** (Romans 6:3-11)

A reading from the letter of St. Paul to the Romans:

Brothers and sisters:

Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus  
were baptized into his death?

We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death,  
so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead  
by the glory of the Father,  
we too might live in newness of life.

For if we have grown into union with him through a death like his,  
we shall also be united with him in the resurrection.  
We know that our old self was crucified with him,  
so that our sinful body might be done away with,  
that we might no longer be in slavery to sin.  
For a dead person has been absolved from sin.  
If, then, we have died with Christ,  
we believe that we shall also live with him.  
We know that Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more;  
death no longer has power over him.  
As to his death, he died to sin once and for all;  
as to his life, he lives for God.  
Consequently, you too must think of yourselves as being dead to sin  
and living for God in Christ Jesus.

The word of the Lord  
**All:** Thanks be to God.

### **Gospel Acclamation**

**All:** Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,  
for his mercy endures forever.  
Let the house of Israel say,  
“His mercy endures forever.”

**All:** Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

### **Gospel (Matthew 28:1-10)**

*Leader:* The Lord be with you.

**All:** And with your spirit.

*Leader:* A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew  
**All:** Glory to you, O Lord.

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning,  
Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb.  
And behold, there was a great earthquake;  
for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven,  
approached, rolled back the stone, and sat upon it.  
His appearance was like lightning  
and his clothing was white as snow.  
The guards were shaken with fear of him  
and became like dead men.  
Then the angel said to the women in reply,  
“Do not be afraid!  
I know that you are seeking Jesus the crucified.  
He is not here, for he has been raised just as he said.  
Come and see the place where he lay.  
Then go quickly and tell his disciples,  
‘He has been raised from the dead,  
and he is going before you to Galilee;  
there you will see him.’  
Behold, I have told you.”  
Then they went away quickly from the tomb,  
fearful yet overjoyed,  
and ran to announce this to his disciples.  
And behold, Jesus met them on their way and greeted them.  
They approached, embraced his feet, and did him homage.  
Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid.  
Go tell my brothers to go to Galilee,  
and there they will see me.”

The Gospel of the Lord.  
**All:** Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

## **Reflection**

*A prepared reflection may be offered. This time could also be a chance for silent meditation on the readings or even a time to allow each person present to share their own response to the readings and the feast.*

## **Blessing of the Water and Renewal of Baptismal Promises**

*A bowl of water may be used as a physical reminder of Baptism; those gathered may wish to bless themselves and their house after they renew their Baptismal Promises. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, sacramentals, such as water, derive from the baptismal priesthood. In the present context a lay person is able to call God's blessing upon objects and people (CCC 1669).*

*Invite all to extend hands in blessing over the water.*

*Leader: Let us pray.*

Lord our God,  
in your mercy be present to your people  
who keep vigil on this most sacred night,  
and, for us who recall the wondrous work of our creation  
and the still greater work of our redemption,  
graciously bless this water.  
For you created water to make the fields fruitful  
and to refresh and cleanse our bodies.  
You also made water the instrument of your mercy:  
for through water you freed your people from slavery  
and quenched their thirst in the desert;  
through water the Prophets proclaimed the new covenant  
you were to enter upon with the human race;  
and last of all,  
through water, which Christ made holy in the Jordan,  
you have renewed our corrupted nature  
in the bath of regeneration.  
Therefore, may this water be for us

a memorial of the Baptism we have received,  
and grant that we may share  
in the gladness of our brothers and sisters,  
who at Easter have received their Baptism.  
Through Christ our Lord.

**All:** Amen.

*Leader:* Dear brothers and sisters, through the Paschal Mystery  
we have been buried with Christ in Baptism,  
so that we may walk with him in newness of life.  
And so, now that our Lenten observance is concluded,  
let us renew the promises of Holy Baptism,  
by which we once renounced Satan and his works  
and promised to serve God in the holy Catholic Church.  
And so I ask you:

Do you renounce sin,  
so as to live in the freedom of the children of God?

**All:** I do.

*Leader:* Do you renounce the lure of evil,  
so that sin may have no mastery over you?

**All:** I do.

*Leader:* Do you renounce Satan,  
the author and prince of sin?

**All:** I do.

*Leader:* Do you believe in God,  
the Father almighty,  
Creator of heaven and earth?

**All:** I do.

*Leader:* Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered death and was buried,  
rose again from the dead  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father?

**All:** I do.

*Leader:* Do you believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy Catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and life everlasting?

**All:** I do.

*Leader:* And may almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
who has given us new birth by water and the Holy Spirit  
and bestowed on us forgiveness of our sins,  
keep us by his grace,  
in Christ Jesus our Lord,  
for eternal life.

**All: Amen.**

*All bless themselves with the water. Bless the house or room with the remaining water.*

## **Our Father**

*Leader:* At the Savior's command and formed by divine teaching, we  
dare to say:

**All:** Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil:

*Leader:* Deliver us, Lord, we pray, from every evil, graciously grant peace in our days, that, sustained by the help of your mercy, we may be always free from sin and safe from all distress, as we await the blessed hope, the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

**All:** For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

### **Sign of Peace**

*Depending on the setting, the sign of peace may be omitted. In a circumstance where physical contact is unwise, a simple and reverent bow may be more appropriate.*

*Leader:* The peace of the Lord be with you always

**All:** And with your spirit.

*Leader:* Let us offer each other a sign of peace.

### **Conclusion**

*Leader:* May Almighty God bless us through today's Easter Solemnity and, in his compassion, defend us from every assault of sin.

**All:** Amen.

*Leader:* And may he, who restores us to eternal life in the Resurrection of his Only Begotten, endow us with the prize of immortality.

**All:** Amen.

*Leader:* Now that the days of the Lord's Passion  
have drawn to a close,  
may we who celebrate the gladness of the Paschal Feast  
come with Christ's help, and exulting in spirit,  
to those feasts that are celebrated in eternal joy.  
**All:** Amen.

*Leader:* And may the blessing of almighty God,  
the Father, and the Son, + and the Holy Spirit,  
come down on us  
and remain with us for ever.  
**All:** Amen.

*Leader:* Go in peace, alleluia, alleluia.  
**All:** Thanks be to God, alleluia, alleluia.

## Acknowledgements

### The Lectionary Texts

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