

+

EASTER

MIDNIGHT MASS

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Jean PATEAU
Abbot of Our Lady of Fontgombault
(Fontgombault, April 20th, 2025)

Lumen Christi!
The light of Christ!

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
My dearly beloved Sons,

ULIKE THE MAUNDY THURSDAY Mass, the commemoration of the Lord's Last Supper, His last meal with His disciples, which was preceded by the washing of the feet, and after which were instituted the sacraments of the Eucharist and the Holy Orders; unlike the Good Friday function, which opens with a long prostration on the hour on which the Lord gives up His spirit to the Father, the Paschal Vigil commemorates an event which took place in the absence of any witnesses.

Yet, as St. Paul points out, this event is at the core of our faith:

And if Christ be not risen again, then is our preaching vain: and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God: because we have given testimony against God, that He hath raised up Christ, Whom He hath not raised up, if the dead rise not again.^a

a. 1 Co 15:14-15.

Every Sunday, and on the most important solemnities, we profess this faith in the resurrection according to the

Nicaea-Constantinople creed. Concerning the Word of God, the second Person of the Trinity, we confess that He is God, eternally begotten of the Father, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father. We confess that He became incarnate by the Holy Spirit, taking flesh from the Virgin Mary, for us men and for our salvation. We confess the Paschal mystery:

For our sake He was crucified under Pontius Pilatus; He suffered, died, and was buried. On the third day He rose again in fulfilment of the Scriptures; He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

We have just professed this same faith in a more solemn form as we renewed our baptismal promises.

This year, the Church celebrates the anniversary of the first oecumenical council, the council of Nicaea, which took place from May 20th until July 25th, 1700 years ago. On this occasion, she defined as to be held by faith the communion of the Son with the Father in a single God. To precise this, it was necessary to create a word: consubstantial.

The affirmation of the divinity of the Son and His incarnation will lead the Church to affirm that the second person of the Trinity subsists in two natures: the uncreated divine nature, in which the Word is begotten from all eternity of the Father, and the created human nature, according to which He was conceived by the action of the Holy Spirit in Mary's virginal womb.

Sociologists notice a twofold movement among the Christians: the disappearance of a Catholicism received by tradition, in which newborns would naturally receive baptism, life would follow the rhythm of the reception of sacraments, and the more or less regular Sunday Mass attendance; and on the other hand, the emergence "of a 'neo-Christianity', which forgets salvation through the Cross, and performs an 'ideological reading of the Holy Scripture', inclusive, fraternal, and welcoming, but which forgets the existence of evil and the doctrine of original sin."^b

But how could we not fall prey to one or the other of these tendencies, if we omit to feed our faith, both through the sacraments, and the continuing education we can get by

b. France Catholique,
Editorial,
March 26th, 2025.

reading the Bible and a regular study of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, through the modern means of communication and the manifold high-quality teachings they deliver. Christian is first and foremost a life. Once we have acknowledged this fact, this life must be expressed in actions which should be consistent with Christ's teaching. Each Christian has a duty to feed his faith and associate to it his intelligence to seize the truth—insofar as this is possible, since mystery remains a mystery.

If it is true that the moment of the Resurrection had no witness, on the other hand there was no lack of witnesses to attest the Lord's many apparitions. Let us mention the holy women, the apostles, and the many disciples evoked in the readings of the Easter octave. During one of these apparitions, doubting Thomas will put his hand into the Lord's pierced side, from which water and blood had flowed when He was on the cross. He will put his finger into the place of the nails. The Emmaus disciples will walk with Him and share a meal with Him. The same will happen to the apostles near the sea of Tiberias. All this will have taken place before the Ascension, when the apostles could see the Lord rising towards heaven, and blessing them a last time.

A living faith therefore opens for each human life a path of hope, the hope that we, too, are called to encounter Christ in the face-to-face of eternity, as well as in our earthly life, in our humble day-to-day life. Such is our path. It is our remit to chose it resolutely and go forward on it.

Our world is sick with a certain disease, that of despair, of fear of the future. Many circumstances, too numerous to be listed, lead us there. It might perhaps help us to remember the epigraph of the *Dialogues of the Carmelites*:

In a way, you see, Fear is still the daughter of God, redeemed during the night of Good Friday. She's not a pretty sight—no indeed!—she's sometimes scorned, sometimes cursed, disavowed by all. And yet, make no mistake: she stands near the deathbed of each agony, she intercedes for man.^c

c. Georges BERNANOS
Dialogues of the Carmelites

Was not this very desperation, this despair, the temptation to which the apostles had succumbed on the evening of Good

Friday, and during the endless Sabbath? How could they live this day, if not in the fear of the Jews, as the Scripture tells us, and probably also with the deep remorse of having forsaken the Lord. After the Resurrection had been announced, a question rose: How would the first encounter with the Risen One go? Uncertainty did not last very long, but was solved by the Lord in a few words: “Peace be with you.”

Let us listen to Blanche, in the *Dialogues* we have already quoted:

For there has never been but a single morning: that of Easter.
But each night into which we enter is that of the Most Holy Agony.

The Paschal fire, the three *Lumen Christi* which accompany the procession slowly going forward into a still dark church, bear witness to the fact that Christ, our Paschal lamb, has triumphed. Let us live in the light of this everlasting morning, on which the Lord repeats to us these words coming from heaven, “Peace be with you.” Let us firmly hold the hand of Hope, the little girl celebrated by Péguy. Isn’t one of the characteristics of children to lead their parents by the nose? Let’s allow ourselves to be led, and walk in the devouring fire of the Paschal Alleluia, and let us set the world ablaze with this fire.

Whereas our world grown old is sleeping, let us during this holy night rejuvenate our hearts near Mary encountering her Son. As babies, let us try day after day to babble our Fiat along with hers, and let us say with her our Alleluia.

Amen.

