

**HOMILY
BY ADAM CARDINAL MAIDA
HOLY SATURDAY EASTER VIGIL
BLESSED SACRAMENT CATHEDRAL
MARCH 22, 2008**

**(Readings: Genesis 1:1-2:2; Exodus 14:15-15:1; Ezekiel 36:16-17a, 18-28;
Romans 6; Matthew 28:1-10)**

My brother Bishops and Priests, Deacons and Religious, Seminarians, and Parishioners of Blessed Sacrament Cathedral Cluster:

On this most holy night, in union with the Church throughout the world, we celebrate the Vigil of Christ's Resurrection from the dead. Every night of the Church year, we keep vigil, watching and waiting for the Lord's return in glory.

Tonight, our vigil takes on special significance, beauty, and immediacy as we anticipate and relive the mystery of the Lord's Resurrection from the dead. Throughout our journey of Lent, we have shared His suffering, death, and burial, confident that our hope for Resurrection will be fulfilled. Our journey has brought us closer to Him and one another. Our communion now reaches a new level of joy as we welcome new members into the Church and renew our own Baptismal commitment of faith.

As a way of reflecting on what we do tonight and the readings we have just heard, I propose the following theme for our consideration: "*Becoming a New*

Creation.” Tonight, nature and history come together. These are the two primary ways we experience God's presence; we know of God by the wonder of His creation, but even more, by the way He has intervened to restore and renew creation, making it completely new.

Tonight's readings proclaim that creation is made new by God's miraculous intervention that completely changed human history. Tonight, we remember the first creation and anticipate the new and final creation, the fulfillment of all that we see and know. Already now, we begin to celebrate the Lord's Day, the “eighth day,” the day after the Sabbath rest. We set aside our own works of prayer and penance to marvel at the Lord's greater work; freed from our sin and pride, we rest in His glory and His victory.

On this night, as we heard in the Exultet, heaven and earth are joined and we have been reconciled with God. We recall with joy the Passover of our fathers in the faith, the people of Israel, as they moved from slavery to freedom through the water of the Red Sea. Like them, we have followed the pillar of fire – the paschal candle – and now, even darkness is no longer threatening. Evil and sin, and all the forces of the world have been overthrown and conquered. Just as the waters of the Red Sea miraculously became a source of salvation for the Jews, we believe that we ourselves enter into a whole new creation through the waters of Baptism; freed from the slavery of this world, we become the children of God.

All three of our readings from the Hebrew Scriptures have referred to the mystery of Almighty God remaking and refashioning His creation. It is interesting to note that in the Orthodox tradition, the Genesis reading ends with the third day of creation when God commanded the Earth to produce its own fruit, that is, the first fruits of the first creation. Like us, the Orthodox believe that Christ, risen from the tomb on the third day, has become the new Adam, the first fruits of all who have fallen asleep. With the Resurrection of Christ on the third day, a whole new creation has begun.

In His own person, through His dying and rising, Jesus the Christ embodies the new Israel and is the sign of our entrance into the Promised Land. As we share in this mystery, the dry bones and brokenness of this world come back to life in a way even more profound than Ezekiel could have imagined as he dreamed of their return from exile. Because of Christ and His Resurrection, we have not just returned from exile but we have arrived at our heavenly homeland. We are now in communion with the Lord and one another.

Tonight's Gospel from St. Matthew also proclaims the rich possibilities of the new creation. The holy women came to the tomb as the first day of the new week was dawning, that is, the day after the Sabbath rest. As they did so, there was an earthquake, a sign of the radical transformation happening in a spiritual but real way; the very elements of this world were being changed. The angel of the Lord

rolled back the stone, thus symbolizing that Jesus could no longer be separated from us; the angel then sat upon the stone as one further sign of the victory of Christ over sin and death. The guards became like dead men, a reminder that the powers of this world – like Pharaoh’s chariots and charioteers – no longer have any control over us.

The message of the angel to the holy women is also important for us: the angel directed the women to go to Galilee and to share the Good News of the Resurrection with the disciples. They were to go back to the very place where it all began, the place of their first encounter with Jesus. Obedient to the angel’s command, on the way there, the women encountered the Risen Lord Himself. And as Jesus greeted them, He also reinforced the message of the angel: *“Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee and there they will see me...”*

We, too, must set aside our fears and go forth in obedience to all that He asks of us, returning again and again to the purity and simplicity of our “Galilee,” our Baptismal bond of love with Him and one another. Even though we face challenges of body or spirit, we have no reason for fear. Knowing we are deeply loved, we can find the strength to share the Good News of the Resurrection with our brothers and sisters and all who are willing to listen.

We are indeed a new creation. We will celebrate this mystery in the transformation of our humble gifts of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of

the Lord. The bread, representing our labor, and the wine, representing our joy, are transformed by the Risen Lord. Everything about us is new! The new creation is not simply about the elements of the Earth being transformed; it is we, ourselves, who are being made into a whole new creation, a holy people of God, claimed and purified as God's own sons and daughters, brothers and sisters of the Lord Jesus. Tonight, we celebrate the power of God who makes “all things new” and gives us the command to proclaim and live according to the virtues of faith, hope, and love. As we welcome new brothers and sisters into our faith, may we ourselves be reborn into this new creation.

As we keep this solemn vigil tonight, may our whole lives become a living vigil as we watch and wait together for the fulfillment of all our hopes when we will share with all the saints and our loved ones in the eternal Passover of the Kingdom. For now, let us continue on our pilgrim way, enjoying each day the signs of the new creation as it dawns upon us and through us. Amen. Alleluia.