

- My friends, this is the night! *This is the night when Christ broke the prison-bars of death and rose victorious from the underworld.*
- *This is the night that 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 of which it is written: The night shall be as bright as day. It is the truly blessed night, worthy alone to know the time and hour when Christ rose from the underworld!*
- It is a night of *dazzling* brightness, bright even as the day, a night *full of gladness*.
- We heard earlier the glorious story of the Israelites being led out of *slavery in Egypt* into glorious freedom, passing *dry-shod through the Red Sea* – a fitting symbol of the magnificent and life-giving sacrament of Baptism.
- And for 36 of you, this is the night when you, too, will be led out of the slavery of sin, passing through the baptismal waters that lead to freedom.
- Just as the children of Israel were led by a pillar of fire to the freeing waters of the Red Sea, you will be led by Paschal Candle to an octagonal font, whose 8 sides represent the 7 days of creation and the 8th day of re-creation.
- For by being washed in this sacred font, by passing through these holy waters just as the Israelites passed through the Red Sea, a new life begins as the tyranny of eternal death ends for you. You will be re-created, your soul indelibly marked, and your nature transformed.
- This is why the inscription along the outside of our baptismal font reads: “Here a people of godly race are born of heaven; the Spirit gives them life in the fertile waters.”
- This is why the Church sings in the *Exultet*, which we heard earlier, of *the sanctifying power of this night, that dispels wickedness, washes faults away, restores innocence to the fallen, and joy to mourners, drives out hatred, fosters concord, and brings down the mighty.*
- Yet, be not deceived. The gift of new life, the sanctifying grace, that is given to you tonight bears a delicacy that requires great vigilance and care.
- Like a shiny piece of silver that must be safeguarded from those who would abscond with it, and must be polished to keep its gleam, you must be vigilant to keep this gift safe from the enticements of the world, the flesh, and the devil; and you must polish it with the Sacrament of Reconciliation whenever the tarnish of sin begins to build up.
- St. Gregory of Nyssa, one of the 4th c. Cappadocian Fathers, counsels us that the best way to protect this new life of grace is to stick close to Holy Mother Church, whose teachings are our milk, and whose Eucharist is our food.
- He says that we bring our new life of grace to maturity by practicing virtue. He reminds us that our home is the kingdom of Heaven, and our rich inheritance the joys of paradise.
- And Gregory exhorts us that earthly death is not the end to this life of grace, but simply the way and means to that blessed and everlasting life prepared for those who are worthy.
- Of course, our worthiness is not something we can procure totally on our own. We need the constant help of God’s grace, which is why after your baptism you’ll receive the Sacrament of Confirmation, sealing within your soul the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which will strengthen you.
- Then you will receive the bread of angels, our Lord’s Body and Blood, whose flesh is true food and whose blood is true drink. It is this bread from heaven, this grace-filled manna, that

strengthens you to make your pilgrimage through the desert of this world to the Eden of Heaven.

- While we know full well as Catholics that we are saved by God's grace alone, we also know that we are not passive spectators in the great battle for our salvation.
- No, we must participate in this battle by striving for holiness and seeking to do God's will in all things.
- And in this, we are strengthened and safeguarded by the Church's Sacraments, which we are so blessed to receive.
- And it all begins tonight, this night which is as bright as day because of God's grace and mercy.
- With the hosts of Heaven and all the angel ministers of God, let us exult our eternal King Whose mercy and grace make our salvation to abound.