

The Easter Vigil in the Holy Night (Holy Saturday)

Introduction

“Exult, let them exult!” We hear these words at the beginning of the *Exsultet*, The Easter Proclamation, as we trace God’s saving action throughout history. The name *Exsultet* comes from the first word of the prayer: Exult! As a Christian people we do exult, for Christ is risen from the dead and light banishes all traces of darkness.

The Easter Vigil liturgy is rich with symbol and ritual, and the Scripture readings connect us to our ancestors in faith, living the very same hope that we live today. The Genesis reading highlights God’s incredible work of creation, and reminds us that creation and recreation continue today. Abraham’s sacrifice recalls God’s promises and abundant blessings for God’s people, just as the reading from Exodus in which the Israelites cross the Red Sea prefigures Christ’s own resurrection. Readings from the prophets follow, those great heralds of God’s message throughout the ages. The Epistle from Paul to the Romans reinforces our baptismal identity and relationship with Jesus Christ who died and rose.

If time permits, read each of these Scripture passages in your own commemoration of The Easter Vigil. Each of these stories highlights God’s love for God’s people and helps us to celebrate Christ’s resurrection by recalling God’s saving action.

Ritual at Home

The rubrics for The Easter Vigil clearly state that the celebration must take place in the night and end before dawn, for the contrasts between darkness and light are essential. The celebration begins with *Lucernarium*, a service of light often associated with the early church tradition of lighting lamps for evening prayer and rejoicing in the light of Christ.

As you prepare an area for tonight’s prayer, you may wish to light a number of candles. If possible, each person might also have their own candle to hold.

Opening Prayer: We gather this night to rejoice in Jesus Christ, the Light of the World,
the One whom no darkness can overcome,
the One death cannot destroy.

Lighting the candles, continue:

We give you thanks, O God,
for the light this evening that illumines our hearts and home,
and for your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ,
a light so filled with glory and power,
a light undimmed by sin and death,
a light that guides peoples and nations.

May we welcome this light of Christ into our lives. Amen.

Proclamation: All respond: Thanks be to God!

This is the night when Christ poured out his own blood, cleansing us of the ancient sin of Adam:

Thanks be to God!

This is the night when the Paschal Lamb was slain, anointing the hearts and homes of believers:

Thanks be to God!

This is the night when Moses led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt through the Red Sea:

Thanks be to God!

This is the night when Christ rose from the dead, banishing death and darkness forever:

Thanks be to God!

Thanks be to God!: *Thanks be to God!*

You may wish to read the entirety of The Easter Proclamation (Exsultet) which can be found beginning on page 196 of Celebrating the Eucharist.

Reading: Matthew 28:1-10 *While this reading from Matthew is the Gospel, you might also wish to use any of the other readings in your communal prayer. (Celebrating the Eucharist, pages 199–226)*

Litany of the Saints:

Typically, this is the night when catechumens who have been preparing for Initiation are baptized. We pray for all catechumens, that they may know the joy of the Risen Christ as the source of their Christian identity. *If you know the catechumens from your parish, feel free to pray for them by name.*

As is also customary, we call on the intercession of those holy women and men who have walked before us and whose example guides us today. After each invocation, the response is: Pray for us. This list of saints is by no means comprehensive. Add your own favorite saints to the litany!

Holy Mary, Mother of God: *Pray for us.*

Saint Joseph: *Pray for us.*

Saint John the Baptist: *Pray for us.*

Saint Peter and Saint Paul: *Pray for us.*

Saint Mary Magdalene: *Pray for us.*

Saint Felicity and Saint Perpetua: *Pray for us.*

Saint Benedict and Saint Scholastica: *Pray for us.*

All holy men and women: *Pray for us.*

Intercessions: All are welcome to share their own prayers, with everyone responding: “Risen Christ, Light and Life, hear our prayer.”

The Lord's Prayer: Gathering these prayers together,
as well as those we hold in the silence of our hearts,
we pray in the words that Jesus taught us.

Our Father . . .

Prayer: Loving God,
We celebrating your saving work
through our ancestors in faith,
the Resurrection of your Son,
and in our own lives today.
Give us the courage to confront the darkness of this world,
knowing that the Risen Christ brings light and life to all.
We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

All are invited to share a sign of Christ's peace.

Conversation Starters

1. What images, words, or phrases do you associate with Holy Saturday?
2. Which Easter Vigil reading from Hebrew Scripture is your favorite? Why?
3. What role do you play in salvation history?

Continuing the Conversation

Reach out to the catechumens in your community. Perhaps you can send them a card or e-mail to let them know that you are thinking about and praying for them during this Easter season. Send these notes of care to the parish office or Director of Faith Formation so that they can share them with the catechumens. It is important that our faith communities actively support our catechumens!