

Easter Vigil - B

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

During the Easter Vigil Mass there are seven Old Testament readings given, although this may be reduced to two; one of which must be the third reading (Exodus 14). The seven Old Testament readings give an excellent review of salvation history. Due to the number of readings to be presented, only a very short introduction will be given for the individual readings.

1st Reading - Genesis 1:1-2:2 (The creation story)

The opening chapters of the Bible are essential for our understanding of the rest of it. These opening chapters tell us what had been desired by God from the very beginning. The intent of the creation story is not to give a lesson in physics or biology, but a lesson in the theological order of things.

1:1 In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, ² the earth was a formless wasteland, and darkness covered the abyss, while a mighty wind swept over the waters.

The key to understanding this reading is contained in the second verse which is expressed a little more succinctly in the Revised Standard Version "The earth was without form and void ...". Before creation, there was no shape to anything (formless) and everything was empty (void). God created everything out of nothing.

³ Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. ⁴ God saw how good the light was. God then separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." Thus evening came, and morning followed--the first day.

Day 1 = light and dark (day and night)

⁶ Then God said, "Let there be a dome in the middle of the waters, to separate one body of water from the other." And so it happened: ⁷ God

made the dome, and it separated the water above the dome from the water below it. ⁸ God called the dome “the sky.” Evening came, and morning followed--the second day.

Day 2 = sky and water

⁹ Then God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered into a single basin, so that the dry land may appear.” And so it happened: the water under the sky was gathered into its basin, and the dry land appeared. ¹⁰ God called the dry land “the earth,” and the basin of the water he called “the sea.” God saw how good it was. ¹¹ Then God said, “Let the earth bring forth vegetation: every kind of plant that bears seed and every kind of fruit tree on earth that bears fruit with its seed in it.” And so it happened: ¹² the earth brought forth every kind of plant that bears seed and every kind of fruit tree on earth that bears fruit with its seed in it. God saw how good it was. ¹³ Evening came, and morning followed--the third day.

Day 3 = land and vegetation. At the end of 3 days (three being the number of completion in Hebrew numerology) we have a creation which is no longer formless; God has completed forming it. He has created series of realms. Now let's continue looking at the creation story:

¹⁴ Then God said: “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky, to separate day from night. Let them mark the fixed times, the days and the years, ¹⁵ and serve as luminaries in the dome of the sky, to shed light upon the earth.” And so it happened: ¹⁶ God made the two great lights, the greater one to govern the day, and the lesser one to govern the night; and he made the stars. ¹⁷ God set them in the dome of the sky, to shed light upon the earth, ¹⁸ to govern the day and the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. God saw how good it was. ¹⁹ Evening came, and morning followed--the fourth day.

Day 4 = sun, moon and stars (which have dominion over the creation of day 1)

²⁰ Then God said, “Let the water teem with an abundance of living creatures, and on the earth let birds fly beneath the dome of the sky.” And so it happened: ²¹ God created the great sea monsters and all kinds

of swimming creatures with which the water teems, and all kinds of winged birds. God saw how good it was, ²² and God blessed them, saying, "Be fertile, multiply, and fill the water of the seas; and let the birds multiply on the earth." ²³ Evening came, and morning followed--the fifth day.

Day 5 = birds and fish (which have dominion over the creation of day 2)

²⁴ Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth all kinds of living creatures: cattle, creeping things, and wild animals of all kinds." And so it happened: ²⁵ God made all kinds of wild animals, all kinds of cattle, and all kinds of creeping things of the earth. God saw how good it was. ²⁶ Then God said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the cattle, and over all the wild animals and all the creatures that crawl on the ground." ²⁷ God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸ God blessed them, saying: "Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that move on the earth."

²⁹ God also said: "See, I give you every seed-bearing plant all over the earth and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit on it to be your food; ³⁰ and to all the animals of the land, all the birds of the air, and all the living creatures that crawl on the ground, I give all the green plants for food." And so it happened. ³¹ God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good. Evening came, and morning followed--the sixth day.

Day 6 = animals and man (which have dominion over the creation of day 3, as well as the creation which rules over day 2). At the end of the second group of three days (again, the number of completion) the earth is no longer void; God has completed filling it. He has created rulers for the realms.

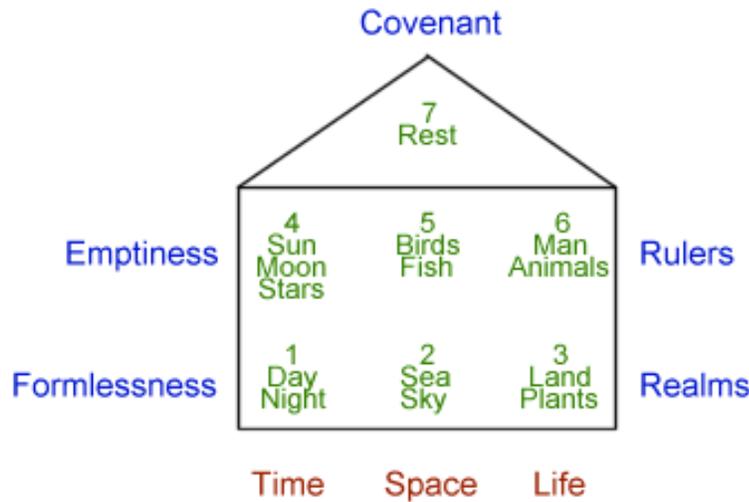
2:1 Thus the heavens and the earth and all their array were completed. ² Since on the seventh day God was finished with the work he had been doing, he rested on the seventh day from all the work he had undertaken.

Day 7 = rest, blessing and sanctification. The third group of days (once again the number of completion) is the seventh day (7 in Hebrew numerology is the

number of perfection, the number of the covenant). God has completed covenanting (“sevening”) Himself with His creation and He has blessed it (given it the place of primacy) and made it holy.

Since light and dark were created on day one and the sun, moon and stars weren’t created until day four, what do the day and night of day one represent? **Time** which is measured by the passage of day and night. St. Thomas Aquinas is reported to have asked “What did God do before He created?”

He then he answered his own question “Nothing, He didn’t have the time.”



2nd Reading - Genesis 22:1-18 (Abraham’s offering of Isaac)

In Genesis 12:2-3 God makes a three-fold promise of blessing to Abraham (2nd Sunday of Lent, Cycle A). These three promises (nation, dynasty, and worldwide blessing) are raised to the status of covenants by God in His later dealings with Abraham: Nationhood in Genesis 15 (fulfilled in Moses), dynasty/kingdom in Genesis 17:1-19 (fulfilled in David), and worldwide

blessing in today's reading (fulfilled in Christ).

1 God put Abraham to the test.

Everywhere else in the Pentateuch God puts the people of Israel to the test. The portrait of Abraham being tested characterizes what is to happen to Israel. Abraham, as the founding father of Israel must entrust his entire life and future to God.

He called to him, "Abraham!"

The name "Abraham" means "father of all nations". It was changed from "Abram" (father who is exalted) to "Abraham" in Genesis 17:5.

"Ready!" he replied.

A statement of complete availability (see Isaiah 6:8)

2 Then God said: "Take your son Isaac, your only one, whom you love,

This statement is not correct in the literal sense as Abraham will have other sons and he already has Ishmael as a result of his union with Hagar, Sarah's maidservant; even though Hagar and Ishmael have been put out of his camp. Isaac is the son favored by God and God emphasizes in His statement the value which Abraham attaches to this son.

and go to the land of Moriah.

Moriah is the mountain range which runs through present-day Israel. 2 Chronicles 3:1 identifies Moriah as the mountain in Jerusalem where Solomon built the temple.

There you shall offer him up as a holocaust on a height that I will point out to you."

A holocaust is a whole burnt offering.

3 Early the next morning Abraham saddled his donkey, took with him his son Isaac, and two of his servants as well, and with the wood that he had

cut for the holocaust, set out for the place of which God had told him.

He starts out right away; this indicates complete and immediate obedience.

⁴ On the third day Abraham got sight of the place from afar.

The third day is the day of completion, the day of resurrection, the day of salvation. Isaac has been dead in Abraham's eyes ever since God has told him to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. On this day he will regain his life, he will be resurrected.

⁵ Then he said to his servants: "Both of you stay here with the donkey, while the boy and I go on over yonder. We will worship and then come back to you." ⁶ Thereupon Abraham took the wood for the holocaust and laid it on his son Isaac's shoulders, while he himself carried the fire and the knife.

Isaac is no small boy, but instead is a strapping young man. Like Jesus, he carries the wood of his sacrifice.

⁷ As the two walked on together, Isaac spoke to his father Abraham. "Father!" he said. "Yes, son," he replied. Isaac continued, "Here are the fire and the wood, but where is the sheep for the holocaust?" ⁸ "Son," Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the sheep for the holocaust." Then the two continued going forward.

The Hebrew word for "will provide" is *yireh*. This is not a ruse but evidence of Abraham's handing everything over to God.

⁹ When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. Next he tied up his son Isaac, and put him on top of the wood on the altar.

Like Jesus, Isaac is bound and placed upon the wood of sacrifice.

¹⁰ Then he reached out and took the knife to slaughter his son. ¹¹ But the LORD'S messenger called to him from heaven, "Abraham, Abraham!"

The angel of God calls out. The angel had also called from heaven and opened

Hagar's eyes to see the well (Genesis 21:17-19) after she and Ishmael had been put out of Abraham's camp.

“Yes, Lord,” he answered. ¹² “Do not lay your hand on the boy,” said the messenger. “Do not do the least thing to him. I know now how devoted you are to God, since you did not withhold from me your own beloved son.”

He acknowledges Abraham's total obedience. Abraham has learned to give up control over his own life so that he might receive it as grace.

¹³ As Abraham looked about, he spied a ram caught by its horns in the thicket.

The ram is wearing a crown of thorns.

So he went and took the ram and offered it up as a holocaust in place of his son.

Hebrew legend has it that the horn by which the ram was caught was cut off and became the first shofar (trumpet). Infant sacrifice was widely practiced in Canaan and in the Phoenician colonies of North Africa. It was even practiced in Israel (2 Kings 16:3; Micah 6:7) in critical times as a means of averting divine wrath. In later times Israel recognized that the firstborn belonged to God (Exodus 13:11-16; 34:19-20) but “redeemed” firstborn sons and donkeys by an alternative sacrifice. This story, in one aspect, tells how the founding father of Israel was “directed” by God to redeem his firstborn by sacrifice of an animal. This is one way that Israel is to differ from its neighbors.

¹⁴ Abraham named the site Yahweh-yireh; hence people now say, “On the mountain the LORD will see.”

Yahweh-yireh means “God will provide”. First known as Salem, the city of which Melchizedek was priest and king, it later became known as Yireh-Salem (Jerusalem). The sacrifice of Isaac wasn't in the wilderness, but in the town of Salem. The reference to “the LORD will see” means that the Lord will see to it, will provide.

¹⁵ Again the LORD'S messenger called to Abraham from heaven

This is the seventh time (the number of covenant) the angel repeats the great promises of God (see Genesis 12:2-3, 12:7; 13:14-17; 15; 17; 18).

¹⁶ and said: "I swear by myself, declares the LORD,

God is swearing a covenant oath (Latin: *sacramentum*). There is no one greater to swear by so God must swear by Himself. By swearing the oath, God calls the covenant curses down upon Himself.

that because you acted as you did in not withholding from me your beloved son, ¹⁷ I will bless you abundantly and make your descendants as countless as the stars of the sky and the sands of the seashore; your descendants shall take possession of the gates of their enemies, ¹⁸ and in your descendants all the nations of the earth shall find blessing--all this because you obeyed my command."

By God swearing the oath, this upgrades the third promise which God made to Abraham (worldwide blessing) in Genesis 12:3 (2nd Sunday in Lent, Cycle A) to the status of a covenant; a covenant which is sealed with the sacrifice of the ram.

3rd Reading - Exodus 14:15-15:1 (the exodus through the Reed Sea)

God has slain the firstborn of the Egyptians and spared the Israelites who have prepared the Passover meal, marked the door posts and lintels of their homes, and eaten the sacrifice as a family. God has led the fleeing Israelites as a column of smoke by day and a pillar of fire by night.

¹⁵ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to go forward. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I receive glory through Pharaoh and his chariots and charioteers." ¹⁹ 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,

The cloud is the indication of God's presence.

²⁰ 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. ²¹ 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.

This suggests that the wind drove the water away, exposing the land which was then dried.

When the water was thus divided, ²² 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.

This suggests that the water is not swept away, but forms walls on either side of the path. The Cecil B. DeMille effect.

²³ The Egyptians followed in pursuit; all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and charioteers went after them right into the midst of the sea. ²⁴ 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; ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ 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."

This is a parallel to verse 21 where the wind drove the water away.

²⁷ 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. ²⁸ 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. ²⁹ 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.

This is a parallel to verse 22, the Cecil B. DeMille effect. All this suggests that quite possibly there are two stories which are intertwined.

³⁰ Thus the LORD saved Israel on that day from the power of the Egyptians. When Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the seashore ³¹ 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.

After all the plagues, including the Passover, the Israelites now believe in God and His chosen instrument of deliverance. How short their memory is.

^{15:1} 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.

4th Reading - Isaiah 54:5-14 (the future glory of Zion)

Written some 750 years before the coming of Christ, Isaiah describes how sinful Jerusalem will be redeemed by God.

⁵ For he who has become your husband is your Maker;

This is covenant imagery; God's people are His family.

his name is the LORD of hosts; Your redeemer is the Holy One of Israel, called God of all the earth. ⁶ The LORD calls you back, like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, A wife married in youth and then cast off, says your God. ⁷ For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with great tenderness I will take you back. ⁸ In an outburst of wrath, for a moment I hid my face from you; But with enduring love I take pity on you, says the LORD, your redeemer.

This theology reflects Genesis 6:6 and 8:21-22 where God has repented of what He has done. Coupled with the covenant image of verse 5, it reflects the theology of Hosea 2:19-25 and 11:1-2 where God cannot cast off His beloved

despite her repeated adulteries

⁹ This is for me like the days of Noah, when I swore that the waters of Noah should never again deluge the earth;

Genesis 8:21. After the flood when God swore “Never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.”

So I have sworn not to be angry with you, or to rebuke you. ¹⁰ Though the mountains leave their place and the hills be shaken, My love shall never leave you

A strong, determined love. The family bond which forms the covenant.

nor my covenant of peace be shaken, says the LORD, who has mercy on you.

The love which will firmly unite the entire universe in harmony and happiness (See Numbers 26:12; Ezekiel 34:25; 37:26; Malachi 2:5)

¹¹ O afflicted one, storm-battered and unconsoled,

A reflection back to Noah (v9). He goes on to offer a vision of the Heavenly Jerusalem.

I lay your pavements in carnelians,

A pale to deep red or reddish-brown gem

and your foundations in sapphires;

A blue gem

¹² I will make your battlements of rubies,

A red gem

your gates of carbuncles,

Not a puss-producing infection, but a deep red garnet

and all your walls of precious stones.

All these are descriptions of the heavenly Jerusalem (see Revelation 21:18-21).

¹³ All your sons shall be taught by the LORD,

All this splendor emanates from the presence of the Lord, where the word of God is taught.

and great shall be the peace of your children. ¹⁴ In justice shall you be established, far from the fear of oppression, where destruction cannot come near you.

Yahweh's glorious victory in Zion

5th Reading - Isaiah 55:1-11 (the eschatological banquet)

After the view of the heavenly Jerusalem, Isaiah invites the people to a banquet of divine joy.

¹ All you who are thirsty, come to the water! You who have no money, come, receive grain and eat; Come, without paying and without cost, drink wine and milk! ² Why spend your money for what is not bread; your wages for what fails to satisfy? Heed me, and you shall eat well, you shall delight in rich fare.

God invites all to a joyful banquet. Covenants are sealed by a meal shared by all parties. From the Passover (Exodus 12), the Sinai covenant (Exodus 24:5,11), all the way through the wedding feast of the Lamb (Revelation 19:9).

³ Come to me heedfully, listen, that you may have life. I will renew with you the everlasting covenant,

Not a covenant beginning now and lasting forever, but one bringing the promises of a distant past to ever-present fulfillment. God's desires of the first

covenant (first reading) will be achieved.

the benefits assured to David.

See 2 Samuel 7:8-16; 23:5; 1 Kings 8:23-25; Psalm 89:2-38.

⁴ As I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander of nations, ⁵ So shall you summon a nation you knew not, and nations that knew you not shall run to you, Because of the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, who has glorified you. ⁶ Seek the LORD while he may be found, call him while he is near.

See Jeremiah 29:13-14. Turn to God with urgent prayer.

⁷ Let the scoundrel forsake his way, and the wicked man his thoughts; Let him turn to the LORD for mercy; to our God, who is generous in forgiving.

Come to the Lord with repentance and humility.

⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD. ⁹ As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts.

These verses combine the mysterious opposites of divine grace: God is transcendent, yet near enough to help; man is helpless, yet required to act energetically; the ways of God are exalted, yet required of man.

¹⁰ For just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down and do not return there till they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful, Giving seed to him who sows and bread to him who eats, ¹¹ So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth;

The Word comes from God, but it can be heard only when it is soaked up in human life and spoken with human accents. Isaiah explains world history, particularly the sacred history of Israel, through the deep, omnipotent presence of the Word. This passage is echoed in John's discourse on the Eucharist: the Word comes down from heaven and is received as bread (John 6:32, 35).

It shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it.

When said, it is done.

6th Reading - Baruch 3:9-15, 32-4:4 (a wisdom poem)

Baruch tells us of the importance of wisdom and that wisdom is the Law.

⁹ Hear, O Israel, the commandments of life:

Commandments that give life (prosperity of every kind) when they are observed (Deuteronomy 30:15-20).

listen, and know prudence!

The parallelism identifies wisdom as the Law.

¹⁰ How is it, Israel, that you are in the land of your foes, grown old in a foreign land, Defiled with the dead,

The diaspora is defiled by association with pagans, who are all but dead and ready to depart to the netherworld because they do not know and observe the law, the source of life. Contact with a corpse defiles (makes unclean) the person (Numbers 19:11-16).

¹¹ accounted with those destined for the nether world? ¹² You have forsaken the fountain of wisdom!

God is the fountain who gives wisdom (Jeremiah 2:13; John 4:13-14).

¹³ Had you walked in the way of God, you would have dwelt in enduring peace. ¹⁴ Learn where prudence is, where strength, where understanding; That you may know also where are length of days, and life, where light of the eyes,

The force within the eye that enables a person to see [Psalm 38:10 (38:11 in

NAB)]

and peace. ¹⁵ Who has found the place of wisdom, who has entered into her treasuries? ³² Yet he who knows all things knows her; he has probed her by his knowledge--He who established the earth for all time, and filled it with four-footed beasts; ³³ He who dismisses the light, and it departs, calls it, and it obeys him trembling;

The light is the sun. Sunset and sunrise are presented as the personified sun obeying God's commands.

³⁴ Before whom the stars at their posts shine and rejoice;

The stars are like sentries keeping watch during the night.

³⁵ When he calls them, they answer, "Here we are!" shining with joy for their Maker. ³⁶ Such is our God; no other is to be compared to him: ³⁷ He has traced out all the way of understanding,

The way of understanding is the way to wisdom.

and has given her to Jacob, his servant, to Israel, his beloved son. ³⁸ Since then she has appeared on earth,

The "she" is wisdom.

and moved among men. ^{4:1} She is the book of the precepts of God, the law that endures forever; All who cling to her will live, but those will die who forsake her. ² Turn, O Jacob, and receive her: walk by her light toward splendor.

Wisdom is presented as the sun.

³ Give not your glory to another, your privileges to an alien race.

The idea seems to be that if Israel fails to observe the Law, God will abandon her and give the Law to another nation (Exodus 32:10; Numbers 14:12; Deuteronomy 9:14).

4 Blessed are we, O Israel; for what pleases God is known to us!

Israel's glory and privileges are the gift of the Mosaic law.

7th Reading - Ezekiel 36:16-17a, 18-28 (blessing upon the people of Israel)

The people will be restored because of an inner change in the human heart and spirit.

16 Thus the word of the LORD came to me: ^{17a} Son of man, when the house of Israel lived in their land, they defiled it by their conduct and deeds.

Omitted is the phrase "In my sight their conduct was like the defilement of a menstruous woman.", a reference to Leviticus 15:19.

18 Therefore I poured out my fury upon them (because of the blood which they poured out on the ground, and because they defiled it with idols). ¹⁹ I scattered them among the nations, dispersing them over foreign lands; according to their conduct and deeds I judged them. ²⁰ But when they came among the nations (wherever they came), they served to profane my holy name, because it was said of them: "These are the people of the LORD, yet they had to leave their land."

What respect can be given to a God who cannot even protect His people on His own land! But God acts to prevent this ridicule of His name in the next verse. The argument is similar to that of Moses with God in Numbers 14:13-19 and Exodus 32:10-11 (the incident where God offered to make a nation of Moses).

²¹ So I have relented because of my holy name which the house of Israel profaned among the nations where they came.

The covenant has been forgotten (see Romans 2:22).

²² Therefore say to the house of Israel: Thus says the Lord GOD: Not for your sakes do I act, house of Israel, but for the sake of my holy name, which you profaned among the nations to which you came. ²³ I will prove the holiness of my great name, profaned among the nations, in whose midst you have profaned it. Thus the nations shall know that I am the

LORD, says the Lord GOD, when in their sight I prove my holiness through you. ²⁴ For I will take you away from among the nations, gather you from all the foreign lands, and bring you back to your own land. ²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water upon you to cleanse you from all your impurities, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.

Baptism. God must cleanse man, man cannot cleanse himself. Although ablution rites (washings) were prescribed in the Law (Exodus 30:17-21; Leviticus 14:52; Numbers 5:17; 19:7,9), they were only external actions – this will go beyond them.

²⁶ I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you, taking from your bodies your stony hearts

The ten commandments were written on stone.

and giving you natural hearts.

Hearts of flesh. The new covenant laws are to be written on the heart.

²⁷ I will put my spirit within you and make you live by my statutes, careful to observe my decrees.

This promise of the spirit will be taken up by Joel (2:28-32) and quoted by Peter at Pentecost (Acts 2:16-21).

²⁸ You shall live in the land I gave your fathers; you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

This is the covenant formula found in Exodus 6:7; Jeremiah 7:23; 11:4; 24:7; 31:33; Ezekiel 14:11; 37:23, 27; Hosea 2:23; Zechariah 8:8; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Hebrews 8:10; Revelation 21:3. I will be your father and you will be my children.

Epistle - Romans 6:3-11

Christ was the one who has showed us the way. As He has done, so also shall we do.

³ [A]re you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

Don't you know? The Roman Christians, instructed in the apostolic teachings, should be acquainted with the effects of baptism. The rite of Christian initiation introduces a human being into union with Christ's suffering and dying. Paul is bringing out that the Christian is not merely identified with the "dying Christ" who has won victory over sin, but is introduced into the very act by which that victory has been won. Therefore the Christian is "dead to sin" and associated with Christ precisely at the time when He formally became the sacrifice for sin and our Savior.

⁴ We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death,

The baptismal rite symbolically represents the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus; the convert descends into the baptismal bath, is covered with its waters, and emerges to a new life. In the act of baptism the person goes through the experience of dying to sin, being buried, and rising--as did Christ. As a result, the Christian lives in union with the risen Christ; a union which comes to fullness when the Christian finds themselves "with Christ in glory."

so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father,

The efficiency of the resurrection is ascribed to the Father, specifically to His glory. As in the Old Testament exodus where miracles were ascribed to Yahweh's glory, so too is the raising of Christ. The glory of the Father shines on the face of the risen Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6) and invests him with power (Romans 1:4) that is life-giving (1 Corinthians 15:45). This transforms the Christian (2 Corinthians 3:18), who is glorified together with Christ (Romans 8:17).

we too might live in newness of life.

Literally, "may walk in newness of life." Baptism brings about an identification of the Christian with the glorified Christ, enabling him or her to live actually with the life of Christ Himself (Galatians 2:20); a new creation is involved. "To walk" is a favorite expression of Paul, borrowed from the Old Testament (2 Kings 20:3; Proverbs 8:20), to designate the conscious ethical conduct of the

Christian. Identified with Christ through baptism, he or she is enabled to lead a new conscious life that can know no sin. Baptism erases all sin, including original sin. The ritual in the New Covenant is more powerful than in the Old. Paul is a sacramentalist.

5 For if we have grown into union with him through a death like his, we shall also be united with him in the resurrection.

Future tense. Baptism identifies us not only with Christ's act of dying but also with his rising; even to a share in the divine inheritance.

6 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.

The destruction of the old sinful self through baptism and incorporation into Christ means liberation from enslavement to sin. We are no longer slaves, but children of God, brothers of Jesus. One's outlook can no longer be focused on sin.

7 For a dead person has been absolved from sin.

Means either 1) from the standpoint of law, a dead person is absolved or acquitted since sin no longer has a claim against them; or 2) the person who has died has lost the very means of sinning. In either case, a change in status has ensued: the old condition has ended and a new one has begun.

8 If, then, we have died with Christ,

Been baptized

we believe that we shall also live with him.

A condition which is not the object of sensible perception or immediate consciousness, it is perceived only with the eyes of faith.

9 We know that Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more; death no longer has power over him. ¹⁰ As to his death, he died to sin once and for all;

This doesn't mean that Jesus' completed act of sacrifice on the cross some 2,000 years ago did it all and is over and done with. Jesus' death, the ultimate sin offering, was sufficient to open heaven for all of us for all time. This offering is still being made for us in heaven (Revelation 5:6) so that we can approach God the Father and have our sins forgiven and forgotten. This sacrifice will never be repeated because it has never ceased.

as to his life, he lives for God. ¹¹ Consequently, you too must think of yourselves as (being) dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus.

Gospel - Mark 16:1-7

Our reading continues from where we left off when we read the Passion last week. As you will remember, at the end of that reading, two Mary's carefully noted the location of Jesus' tomb. In the areas surrounding the walls of Jerusalem, there were literally hundreds, if not thousands, of tombs. If the resurrection is to be proven, it must be shown that they did not return to the wrong tomb. The empty tomb is not in itself a proof of Jesus' resurrection, but it is a necessary condition so that the disciples could proclaim that Jesus had risen (Matthew 28:11-15 contains the charge that the disciples had stolen the body in order to be able to make this proclamation).

16:1 When the sabbath was over,

After sundown. This event, like all resurrection events in the gospels which can be dated, takes place on a Sunday.

“In the time of the old covenant, the sabbath was highly revered. Now under the gospel the sabbath has been recast, now viewed as the Lord's resurrection day. The sabbath formerly had pertained to the pedagogy and rudiments of the law. When the great master Himself came and fulfilled them all for us, all that had prefigured His coming was transformed. The old sabbath was like a candle lit in the night before the rising and appearing of the sun.” (Saint Athanasius, *Homilies*).

Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome

These are the same women who, as we heard in the passion narrative, had

watched Jesus die on the cross and had observed where He was buried.

bought spices so that they might go and anoint him.

According to John 19:40, Jesus' body had already been prepared for burial but Mark tells us of a hasty burial and assumes that the preparations had not been observed [although He had been anointed at the home of Simon the leper with nard (as we heard in the passion narrative last week)].

² Very early when the sun had risen, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb.

According to the Jewish calendar, Sunday is the first day of the week. Jesus had been crucified and buried on Friday (15 Nisan) so Sunday is 17 Nisan, three days later. This is the first Easter Sunday.

³ They were saying to one another, "Who will roll back the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?"

The stone was a large round one, fitted into a groove at the entrance of the tomb. Why they hadn't considered this problem before setting out is not explained.

⁴ When they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back; it was very large.

Neither is there an explanation of how the stone had been rolled back.

⁵ On entering the tomb they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a white robe,

White robes are symbols of heavenly beings and according to Matthew 28:5 he was an angel. It is interesting that the Greek term for young man, *neaniskos*, was used previously in the Passion narrative in reference to the one who ran away naked at Jesus' arrest.

"And let us also take note of what it means that the angel is seen sitting on the right side. For what does the left side mean but this present life; and the right hand side, if not life eternal? . . . And so, since our redeemer has now passed

over beyond the mortality of this present life, rightly does the angel, who had come to announce His entry into eternal life, sit at the right side. And he came clothed in white: for he was announcing the joy of this our present solemnity” (Saint Pope Gregory the Great, *Homilies 21*).

and they were utterly amazed. ⁶ He said to them, “Do not be amazed! You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has been raised; he is not here.

The empty tomb is explained in terms of resurrection. The passive tense assumes that God has raised Him.

Behold the place where they laid him. ⁷ But go and tell his disciples and Peter,

The head of the apostles. Note it is the faithful women who have first received the Easter message, but this is an indication that Peter’s denials have been forgiven.

‘He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you.’”

This message points back to Jesus’ prophecy in Mark 14:28 (I will go before you to Galilee) and forward to the appearance there at the close of Matthew’s gospel. Luke and John recount appearances in Jerusalem.

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