



The Holy See

EASTER VIGIL *HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE JOHN PAUL II* Holy Saturday, 11 April 1998

1. *"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen 1:26). "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27).*

In this Easter Vigil, the Liturgy proclaims the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, which recalls the mystery of creation and, in particular, the creation of man. Once more our attention centres on the *mystery of man*, the mystery made fully manifest in Christ and through Christ.

"Fiat lux", "faciamus hominem": these words of Genesis disclose their full truth when they are passed through the crucible of the Passover of the Word (cf. *Ps. 12:6*). During the quiet of Holy Saturday, through the silence of the Word, they find their fullest meaning: that *"light"* is the new light which will never fade; that *"man"* is *"the new man created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness"* (*Eph 4:24*).

The new creation comes about at Easter. In the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection all is redeemed, and everything becomes once more perfectly good, according to God's original plan.

It is above all man, the prodigal son who squandered in sin the precious treasure of freedom, who regains his lost dignity. *"Faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram"*. How true and profound these words sound on Easter night! And how wonderfully timely they are for the men and women of today, so aware of their ability to control the universe, but often so confused about the true meaning of life, in which they are no longer able to recognize the signs of the Creator.

2. In this regard, I am reminded of certain passages of the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* of the Second Vatican Council, which blend harmoniously with the marvellous symphony of the Readings of the Easter Vigil. In fact, this Council document, if carefully studied, proves to be profoundly Paschal in both its content and its guiding inspiration. In it we read: "Only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of him who was to come (cf. Rom 5:14), namely, Christ the Lord. Christ ... is 'the image of the invisible God' (Col 1:15). He himself is the perfect man. To the sons of Adam he restores the

divine likeness which had been disfigured from the first sin onward . . . By his incarnation the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every man. By suffering for us he not only provides us with an example for our imitation. He blazed a trail, and if we follow it, life and death are made holy and take on a new meaning. The Christian man, conformed to the likeness of that Son who is the firstborn of many brothers, receives 'the first-fruits of the Spirit' (Rom 8:23) . . . Through this Spirit who is 'the pledge of our inheritance' (Eph 1:14), the whole man is renewed from within, even to the achievement of the 'redemption of the body' (Rom 8:23): 'If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, then he who raised Jesus from the dead will also bring to life your mortal bodies, because of his Spirit who dwells in you' (Rom 8:21). The Christian . . . linked with the Paschal mystery and patterned on the dying Christ, will hasten forward to resurrection in the strength which comes from hope" (No. 22).

3. These words of the recent Council present to us once more the mystery of the vocation of every baptized person. They present it in a particular way to you, dear Catechumens, who, according to the Church's very ancient tradition, will receive Holy Baptism in the course of this holy Vigil. We greet you with affection and we thank you for your witness.

You come from different nations throughout the world: Canada, China, Colombia, India, Italy, Poland, South Africa.

Dear friends, in a very special sense Baptism constitutes your Passover, the sacrament of your redemption, of your new birth in Christ through faith and the power of the Holy Spirit, by virtue of which you will be able to call God by the name of "Father" and will yourselves be children in the Son.

We express the hope that the new life which you will receive as a gift this most holy night will grow to its fullest, bringing abundant fruits of love, joy and peace, the fruits of eternal life.

4. "*O vere beata nox!*", the Church sings in the Paschal *Exsultet*, recalling the great works of God wrought in the Old Testament during the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. This is the prophetic announcement of the exodus of the human race from the slavery of death to new life through Christ's Passover.

O vere beata nox!, we repeat with the Easter hymn, contemplating the universal mystery of man in the light of Christ's Resurrection. In the beginning God created man in his own image and likeness. By the power of Christ, crucified and risen, this likeness to God, obscured by sin, has been restored and brought to its highest point. And with the ancient author we can repeat: Man, look at yourself! Recognize the dignity of your calling! Christ, victorious over death on this holy night, opens before you the gates of life and immortality.

Echoing the words sung by the deacon in the Easter proclamation, I repeat with joy: *Annuntio*

vobis gaudium magnum: surrexit Dominus vere! Surrexit hodie!

Amen!

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