

Insights in Liturgy

The Easter Vigil: The Fire, The Word

Part I
Plato (d. 347? B.C.) describes us mortals as people in the night sitting at the mouth of a cave, watching the grotesque shadows cast on the inside walls by a fire blazing behind us.

Christians are all summoned to gather with one another on one night of the year, the holiest night of all, the Eve of Easter. We are to keep a vigil in darkness, like the darkness before God said, "Let there be light," like the darkness of Egypt during the exodus of Israel, like the darkness in the tomb of the crucified Jesus.

The great paschal candle is now lifted onto its stand in front of us all, burning there like the pilot-fire

which God set aflame for the Hebrews during their Exodus nights. Holding our lights, we pay heed to the Exultet, an ecstatic eulogy of the Easter Light and of the Paschal night which brought forth so many marvels.

It transports us into the ancient night of the Hebrew Exodus, which now we are reliving in our night-watch of Jesus' Resurrection. On that long-ago night God saved the Hebrews from Egyptian bondage, led them dry-shod through the sea, dispelled their darkness with the pillar of fire.

The vigil we keep in this Year of the Lord, is the night of Jesus' Exodus from death to life, from darkness in the tomb into the light of Resurrection.

The vigil we keep is also the night of our Exodus with Jesus when we were bap-

tized. No matter what the date of our Baptism, that was our own personal Easter. For then we descended under the water to die and be buried with Christ, and we were raised out of it to be risen with Him into new life.

All these manifold facets of the Hebrew and the Christian Exodus, centering on the Exodus of the Dying and Rising Lord Jesus, are jubilantly proclaimed in this Song of the Easter Candle during the Vigil.

The Vigil advances, after the Light Service, into the Word Service. There is a long sequence of Bible readings - quite formidable if all are read - seven from the Old Testament (of which at least three must be chosen, although ideally all should be included), an epistle and a gospel, with attendant responsorial psalms and prayers.

be long: they thought the Second Coming would occur during it, and they wanted to be waiting, like the wise virgins of the parable, with their lamps burning. A long series of Bible readings helped to while away the time.

If only three or four out of the seven are chosen, the one from Exodus should always be included. In one way or another, all the Vigil Lessons have some relation to the baptism experience. After the last Old Testament Lesson, the Glory to God is sung and all the church bells are rung for the first time since their silence on Good Friday.

Following this, the Easter Collect is prayed. Then comes the New Testament

Lesson, from St. Paul. And now, in a moment long waited for, the thrilling tones of the first Easter Alleluia, unheard since before Ash Wednesday. After its Lenten silence it blossoms on the air as radiantly as the first crocuses that welcome the Spring from underneath the snow.

The Word Service reaches its noble summit with the Gospel proclamation: "Jesus is Risen, even as He said. The tomb is empty. Why seek the living among the dead? Behold the place where they laid Him. Go tell His disciples and Peter."

(Parts three and four will be reviewed next week.)

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ALL IN THE FAMILY Sarah Child

My children love the set of public service announcements created by the Mormon Church and seen at frequent intervals on local television stations.

It's hard to miss them. They're the ones which show, in one instance, a little boy running in with a good report card whose ogre of a father can only respond by yelling about the child's door slamming.

In another vignette a young girl tells her mother that she has finished the dishes and the equally insensitive mother counters with a nit-picking question about the counters being properly wiped.

There was a time when I would have taken those little skits too much to heart. Agreed, the Mormons make a good point - overlooking a youngster's accomplishment is definitely counterproductive and such negativism will lead to nothing on the part of any individual, young or old.

But, the truth is, as other parents can no doubt confirm, the premise works both ways.

For example, the other day I was having what I

thought was a tender moment with our ten year old son.

You know, I told him, the older you get, the fewer close moments you and I seem to have.

"But I love you even more now than when you were a baby."

"That's good, Mom" said my son with almost as much enthusiasm as if I told him we were having spaghetti for supper.

His sisters frequently demonstrate the same cool indifference to their father's and my overtures. But, even worse, they parallel the insensitive parents in the TV skits when it comes to our accomplishments and appearance.

The older child managed to negate her father's compliment to me for a particular meal when she opined that as a cook I rated "honorable mention."

Her younger sister is no slouch either aiming barbs, particularly, when it comes to her father's hairline.

Once I mentioned how trim and youthful he looked now that he jogged regularly.

She agreed somewhat diffidently then added: "He'd look even younger with hair."

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Make a miracle.

Joanne and David Brownlee did. They took a desperate child and gave that child hope. Her name is Cintia. Even though she lives very far away, she lives close to the Brownlees' hearts. When Cintia was born, her parents already had eight children. They lived in a two-room hut exposed to the scorching sun and the drenching rains. Cintia's mother works hard washing clothes, but the little money she earns just isn't enough to feed and clothe her family. Until the Brownlees came into her life, Cintia had no hope. Now she has food to eat and clothes to wear. Medical care. And a chance to go to school. Because the Brownlees sponsor her through the Christian Children's Fund. It costs them \$15 a month, but it helps give Cintia so much.



You can make a miracle. Become a sponsor. You needn't send any money now - you can "meet" the child assigned to your care first. Just fill out and mail the coupon. You'll receive the child's photograph, background informa-



tion, and detailed instructions on how to write to the child. If you wish to sponsor the child, simply send in your first monthly check or money order for \$15 within 10 days. If not, return the photo and other materials so we may ask someone else to help. You can give a desperate child hopes and dreams. And that's a miracle.

For the love of a hungry child. Dr. Verent J. Mills CHRISTIAN CHILDREN'S FUND, Inc., Box 26511, Richmond, Va. 23261 PCJL33 I wish to sponsor a boy girl. Choose any child who needs help. Please send my information package today. I want to learn more about the child assigned to me. If I accept the child, I'll send my first sponsorship payment of \$15 within 10 days. Or I'll return the photograph and other material so you can ask someone else to help. I prefer to send my first payment now, and I enclose my first monthly payment of \$15. I cannot sponsor a child now but would like to contribute \$ Name Address City State Zip Member of American Council of Voluntary Agencies for Foreign Service, Inc. Gifts are tax deductible. Canadians: Write 1407 Yonge St., Toronto, Ontario M4T 1Y8. Statement of income and expenses available on request. Christian Children's Fund, Inc.