

Easter renewal

By Father Lawrence Mick
NC News Service

Mike was about 29. He had been studying the Catholic faith along with a group of others for seven months. His wife, Nancy, was Catholic and they had just welcomed their second child into the family.

Mike had attended a Catholic university and had considered joining the church for some time. But this year was somehow different. He sensed a call from God to become part of the Catholic community.

Mike was initiated into the church at the Easter Vigil in 1973. A new Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults had been issued by Rome the previous year, but it had not yet been translated into English. None of us at the parish had even heard of it then.

Consistent with it, however, we had an intuitive sense that the Easter Vigil was the only night to celebrate an event of such significance in the lives of those who, like Mike, had come to recognize the Catholic Church as their religious home.

A few days later, I visited Mike and Nancy at home. Mike was nearly ecstatic as he told me how beautiful and powerful the experience had been. "It was a night I'll never forget," he said emphatically.

The night marked a significant moment in Mike's journey through life. But he also spoke at length about the liturgical celebration itself. What touched Mike deeply were the basic symbols of the Vigil.

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We had begun outside in the dark, where the new fire was kindled, pushing back the power of the darkness. Then the Easter candle was prepared and lit, reminding us of the triumph of the Light of the World.

Processing into church behind the candle, we passed its flame from hand to hand until the darkness in the church gave way to the warm glow of hundreds of flickering lights.

After the singing of the glorious Exultet — the Easter Proclamation — we recounted the history of God's action in the world through a series of scripture readings.

The exuberant singing of the "Glory to God" and the Easter "Alleluia" celebrated the proclamation of the good news of the resurrection.

After the homily, Mike and the others were initiated into the

church, some through baptism, some through a profession of faith. (In those days before the new Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, the confirmation of adults had to await a later day.) Then all joined in celebrating the Easter Mass and sharing the body and blood of the Lord.

Mike and the others who entered the church that night became central symbols of the Easter celebration for the rest of us. For the resurrection celebrated at Easter is not just the historical rising of Christ in the first century. The rising of Christ is celebrated here and now in those coming to new life in him. In them the death of sin and the flowering of new life are seen.

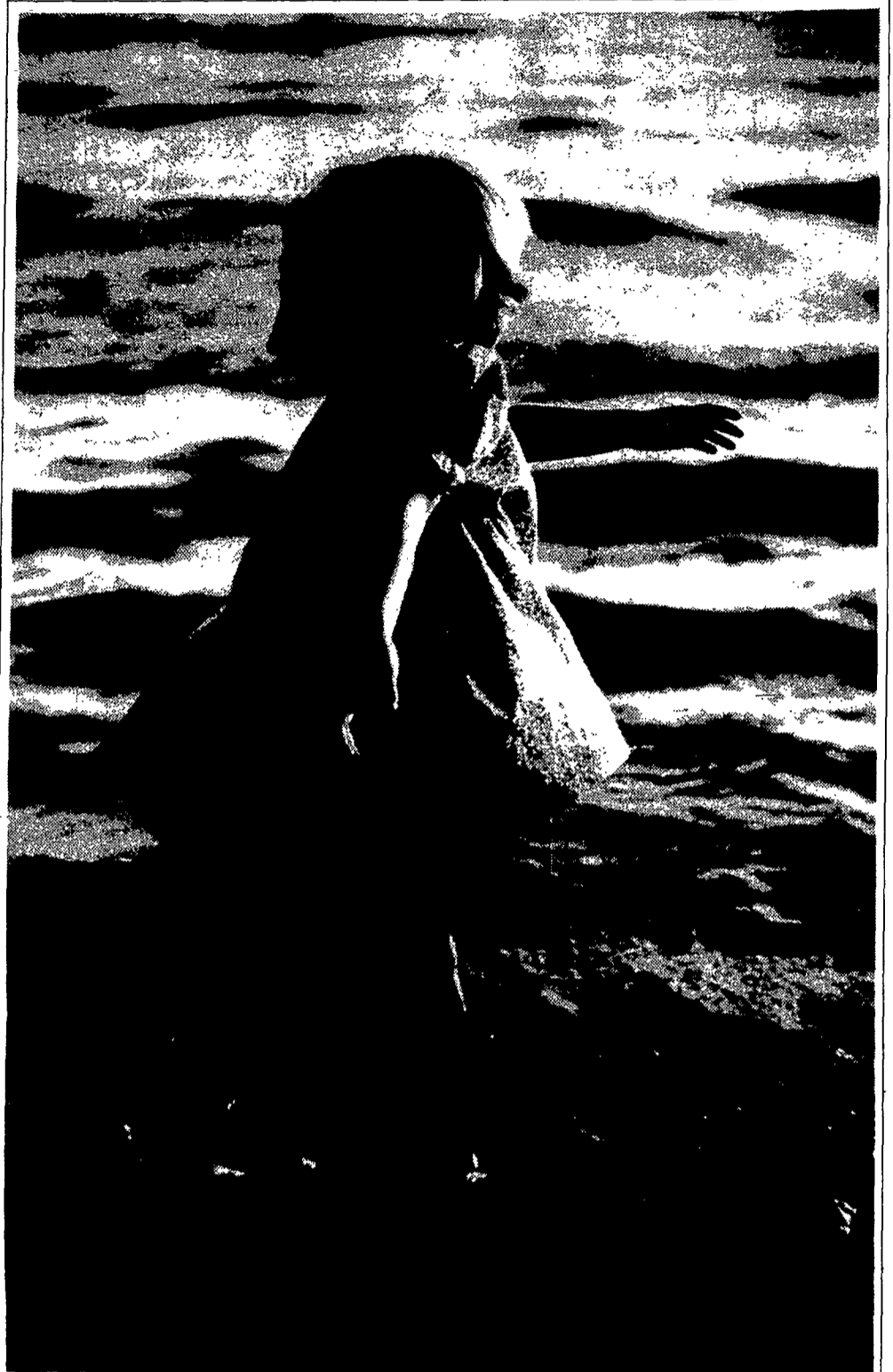
At the Easter Vigil, new Catholics stand as a vivid reminder to the rest of the congregation of who we are and how we are called to live. All renew baptismal vows at Easter.

We are the baptized and that is the basis of our lives. For those who have died and risen with Christ, all the world is changed and new. We live by different values, seek different goals.

This is what it means to be the church: to live out in our lives the death and resurrection of Jesus. That is why Easter is the greatest and most central of feasts.

Whatever day we actually were baptized, Easter is its anniversary.

(Father Mick is a pastor and author in St. Mary's, Ohio.)



Life-giving water

By Father John Castelot
NC News Service

Water is not plentiful in Israel. Wells are few and far between, rainfall unpredictable.

Modern Israel employs technological expertise to bring the waters of the Lake of Galilee into homes. But in biblical times such technology was unknown.

No rain falls from April to October. In the rainy season precipitation can be abundant or minimal. Before the modern era people had to preserve whatever rain did fall in cisterns for use throughout the dry months. Carefully and with painstaking labor the hillsides were terraced to hold the moisture that ensured good crops.

Of course, if the rainfall was meager, the crops suffered and so did the people. It was a simple

matter: no rain, no food — famine and gnawing hunger.

No wonder water came to be such a powerful symbol in the culture. Water literally meant life.

That is why the symbolism of water — life-giving water — pervades the church's Easter Vigil, the celebration of life's triumph over death.

The account of creation in the first reading of the Easter Vigil tells of God's triumph over the primeval waters, bringing order out of chaos.

Another story of creation, in Genesis 2:4, also is pervaded by water imagery. It pictures a great river flowing through God's garden and branching out to form the four great rivers known to the author. This headwater issuing into life-giving streams symbolizes the superabundance of God's favor to all humanity.

The reading from Exodus tells how the Israelites, escaping Egypt, crossed the sea, another instance of control of the waters. For water could be destructive; in the mythology of ancient times it symbolized evil, chaos.

When controlled, water was beneficial; when uncontrolled, it could sweep away rather than sustain life.

In another Easter Vigil reading the Lord says, "All you who are thirsty, come to the water!" Through the resurrection of Jesus, God has conquered death and brought life to humanity, a life surpassing even the wonder of natural life.

It was this life Jesus spoke about in his dialogue with the Samaritan woman at the well. When he promised to give her "living water" she became terribly excited.