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Sacred Heart Parish, Effingham, Illinois
15 April 2006

At the Easter Vigil in the Holy Night of Easter
Based on an Ancient Homily for Holy Saturday

"Something strange is happening - there is a great silence on earth today, a great silence and stillness. The whole earth keeps silence because the King is asleep. The earth trembled and is still because God has fallen asleep in the flesh and he has raised up all who have slept ever since the world began. God has died in the flesh and hell trembles with fear."

The tomb of Jesus is empty. We are told, "He has been raised; he is not here" (Mark 16:6). "He has gone to search for our first parent, as for a lost sheep. Greatly desiring to visit those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death, he has gone to free from sorrow the captives Adam and Eve. The Lord approached them bearing the Cross, the weapon that had won him the victory . . . He took him by the hand and raised him up, saying, 'Awake, O sleeper, and rise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.'

Jesus says to Adam, "I am your God, who for your sake have become your son. Out of love for you and your descendants I now by my own authority command all who are held in bondage to come forth, all who are in darkness to be enlightened, all who are sleeping to arise. I order you, O sleeper, to awake. I did not

create you to be held a prisoner in hell. Rise from the dead, for I am the life of the dead. Rise up, work of my hands, you who were created in my image. Rise, let us leave this place, for you are in me and I in you; together we form one person and cannot be separated." So he says to each of us! He has not created us for slavery but for freedom! He has not created us for death but for life! He has not created us to be servants but friends! Through Baptism and the Holy Eucharist he makes us one with himself and he gives to us a share in his divine life.

To Adam he says, "For your sake I, your God, became your son; I, the Lord, took the form of a slave; I, whose home is above the heavens, descended to the earth and beneath the earth. For your sake, for the sake of man, I became like a man without help, free among the dead. For the sake of you, who left a garden, I was betrayed to the Jews in a garden, and I was crucified in a garden.

"See on my face the spittle I received in order to restore to you the life I once breathed into you. See there the marks of the blows I received in order to refashion your warped nature in my image. On my back see the marks of the scourging I endured to remove the burden of sin that weighs upon your back. See my hands, firmly nailed to a tree, for you who once wickedly stretched your hand out to a tree.

"I slept on the cross and a sword pierced my side for you who slept in paradise and brought forth Eve from your side. My side has healed the pain in yours. My sleep will rouse you from your sleep in hell. The sword that pierced me has sheathed the sword that was turned against you.

"Rise. Let us leave this place. The enemy led you out of the earthly paradise. I will not restore you to that paradise, but will enthrone you in heaven. I forbade you the tree that was only a symbol of life, but see, I who am life itself am now one with you. I appointed cherubim to guard you as slaves are guarded, but now I make them worship you as God. The throne formed by the cherubim awaits you, its bearers swift and eager. The bridal chamber is adorned, the banquet is ready, the eternal dwelling places are prepared, the treasure houses of all good things lie open. The kingdom of heaven has been prepared for you from all eternity."

As he says to Adam so he says to each of us, especially to you, Greg, Michael, and Crystal, who are to become one with us and one with the Lord Jesus Christ this most holy and blessed of all nights. Tonight, through the saving waters of Baptism new life is to be given to you.

You, Jared, Mark, Cordell, and Jami, who are already one with us in Baptism, you are soon to be received into the Church of Rome founded by the Savior himself upon the Apostle Peter

through your profession of faith. And Charity, your initiation into the Catholic Church will soon be completed as you are sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Let us cease now this vigil and this waiting; we have waited long enough; let us begin, for the tomb is empty and the Lord is risen from the dead! Alleluia!