

Easter Even Ante-Communion 2021
Homily – Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney
St. Matthew 57.57-66

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This is the night of anticipation.

In the early days of the Church, there was no celebration of the Eucharist on Easter Even. This was the night Candidates for Holy Baptism assembled to prepare for their admittance into the Body of Christ...by reciting the Creed and renouncing Satan and all his works.

This is a good time for us to remember the promises made on our behalf at our own baptisms to renounce Satan and all his works...promises we made for ourselves at our Confirmations.

What followed was a lengthy Ante-Communion Service. Tonight's Liturgy incorporates elements of the Great Vigil from the Anglican Missal...and the much shorter Ante-Communion from the *Book of Common Prayer*.

We began by singing "The Light of Christ"... "Thanks be to God"...three times as we entered the Sanctuary in darkness. We then heard the Exultet chanted...inviting us to join with all the heavenly legions of Angels...Christ's overpowering darkness and death for all mankind.

We then pressed five grains of incense...representing the five wounds inflicted on Jesus' body...into the Paschal Candle and blessed it with Holy Water. We then lit the candles on the High Altar...decorated and ready for Christ's return. The church lights were then turned on...bringing light out of the darkness of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday.

Tonight we join Mary Magdalene and the other women at the grave. Earlier a wealthy man named Joseph from Arimathea asked Pilate to release Jesus' body...he did not want it displayed on the cross on Passover...it would have been a final act of humiliation for Jesus' mother and friends to endure.

Who was this Joseph of Arimathea? He was a secret disciple of Jesus...a well-respected member of the community. He was a member of the Temple Council that wanted Jesus put to death...but he refused to consent to their decision. Legend has him traveling to Britain to spread the Gospel.

Isaiah prophesied almost 800 years before the birth of Jesus, the grave of the "Suffering Servant" (Jesus), would be that of a rich man. Joseph of Arimathea made Isaiah's prophecy come true when he had Jesus buried in his own grave.

But the religious leaders weren't satisfied with Jesus' death...they wanted to make sure his body stayed where it was...in the grave. So Pilate ordered his soldiers to guard the grave. Mary Magdalene and the others have gone home. They wait for what was next. We wait.

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