

Understanding Holy Saturday



**Saint Francis of Assisi
Roman Catholic Church
Kitchener, Ontario**

HOLY SATURDAY:

Easter Vigil begins at 8:30 pm. This is the highest and most important liturgy in the entire church calendar. Within this celebration of the Easter Vigil we move from the pain of Christ's death to the joy of his resurrection.

The Vigil begins with the church in darkness and silence, for the great news of the resurrection is still to be announced. At the appointed time the community moves outside, regardless the weather, and gathers around the **Easter Fire** – our only source of light and warmth as we await the Good News. The Easter fire is blessed, and from this blessed fire the light is transferred to our new Easter Paschal candle. From the Paschal candle the light is transferred to the small candles that everyone is holding – the light, the news of Christ's resurrection is beginning to spread and light up our darkness. We are all parts of Christ's body, we all carry within us the light of Christ, because of this we all share in the honour and privilege of carrying the light of Christ into the darkness of our church. Our action dispels the darkness of Christ's death, dispels the sin found within the darkness, and most importantly, the warmth of Christ's presence is once again in our midst.

As the light of Christ Risen begins to fill the church with new light the **Easter Exultet** is proclaimed. This is a sung proclamation that says there is no darkness, nor death, that can hold back the glorious news that Christ is risen, and that this has been foretold throughout all of salvation history.

We are then invited to hear the proclamation of our salvation history through various scripture accounts. The scriptures are the very words that have brought us to this

great moment. We will hear two readings from the Book of Genesis (the Creation account and the story of Abraham being asked to sacrifice Isaac), one from the Book of Exodus (which recounts the crossing of the Red Sea), two readings from the Prophet Isaiah (the proclamation of the everlasting love of God, and the promise of covenant with God), from the Prophet Baruch (we are invited to walk towards God's light), from the Prophet Ezekiel (we are promised a new heart), from Paul's Letter to the Romans (Christ has been raised from the dead), and the Gospel of Mark (we are told that the crucified one has been raised). Just before the reading from the Letter to the Romans and the Gospel of Mark, after a 40 day absence from our liturgy, we joyfully sing our Gloria as the lights are turned on. These nine scripture readings, with a sung responsorial Psalm and oration prayer between each, will remind us that what has now been fulfilled was announced since the very dawn of creation.

The interior church lights are now all on, and the Paschal candle is burning brightly in our midst. We now have one more important task to carry out in order to announce this great news to the world - *“unseal”* the waters of our baptismal font. Water will be blessed by calling upon the Saints in Heaven (Litany of the Saints is sung) and poured into our baptismal font. Finally, after the long dry days of Lent we once again have the living waters of new life in our church. Christ is again sacramentally present with us through the waters of Baptism. Next, together we will renew our baptismal promises as we profess the very faith we celebrate this night. Everyone will then be renewed and refreshed as the sprinkling rite with the newly blessed baptismal waters is carried out.

Having completed all this we are now invited to show our thanks to God. What better way to show our thanks than to

celebrate Eucharist together. And so we will break bread, bless it and share it; we will pour wine, bless it and share it. As Christians this is our highest, and most important way of showing God our thanks and praise.

With the closing blessing and song our celebration does not conclude. There will be an Easter feast in the parish hall so that we can continue to share with one another the news that Christ is alive, risen from the dead.

For those who have never participated in an Easter Vigil this is a great opportunity to do so. This celebration offers us an experience of Christ through all our senses: to see Christ Risen, to hear Christ Risen, to taste Christ Risen; to smell Christ Risen, and to feel Christ Risen.

For those who respond with “what a long service!” you are correct, it is rather lengthy – the re-telling of our salvation history, the proclamation of Christ Risen, the celebration of Eucharist – it all takes time. Yet, this is central to our faith, all that we believe is highlighted on this night, the news of the Resurrection deserves nothing less. In truth we should only call what we do here at Saint Francis as a mini vigil, for a true vigil would continue until sun rise, when the light of the resurrection breaks upon the day.