

## Easter Vigil Homily: *But we are here this night!*

*Why do you seek the living one among the dead?*

So said the angels  
to Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Mary the mother of James  
when they came to the tomb on the first Easter morning.

*Why do you seek the living one among the dead?*

Now, don't hear that as a put-down from the angels.  
After all, at least these three women  
had the courage to come to the tomb.  
Seems that most of the men, the apostles,  
weren't ready to make a public appearance yet  
and were holed up in a locked room, out of fear,  
wanting to protect themselves  
from suffering the same fate as Jesus.  
Even when they heard the truth the women came to report,  
they dismissed it as nonsense and refused to believe them.

The more things change, the more they remain the same...

Fear, pride, groupthink, self-preservation,  
suspicious resistance to the unexpected  
even and especially when the news is good --  
all of these human weaknesses can block out the truth  
and keep us from it  
even when the truth is this:  
*Jesus Christ is risen from the dead!*

Those very same weaknesses were at play in the Garden of Eden  
when our first parents traded in the paradise they had  
for a serpent's cheap promises.  
And ever since then we have been likewise tempted  
and have fallen - all of us -  
and we have traded in our truth, our integrity, our faith,  
our common sense, our humanity, our virtue  
and even the innocence of our children  
for power, position, pleasure, prestige  
and the protection of institutions.

All of us have done this  
and in as many ways as there are many of us.  
The failures of some make the headlines,  
often deservedly so.  
The failures of most achieve less notoriety,  
the blessing of obscurity.

After 40 days of Lenten penance  
and just fresh from the somber, sober story of Good Friday,  
we should be ready to spring into Easter mode.  
But even on a weekend as gloriously beautiful as this one,  
a cloud, a veil covers and mutes our joy  
as yet once again our church and its leaders  
are called to the world's witness stand  
accused of heinous crimes and cover-ups.

Where the interrogation leads us is yet to be seen.  
Nor is this the time to speculate on the outcome.  
The task at hand is to know what Easter speaks  
to a church in such straits.

Many have left the Church.  
Even more have dismissed us as misguided and pathetic.  
*But we are here this night.*  
We have come together as the Church in Concord, Massachusetts.  
We have come to hear the Lord's Word,  
and to renew the promises of our baptism:  
to reject sin;  
to reject the glamour of evil and refuse to be mastered by it;  
to reject Satan and all his works and empty promises;  
to renew our faith in God,  
in his son Jesus, and in the Holy Spirit.  
We have come to meet the Risen Lord  
in the gift of his Body and Blood  
in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

We come as those who have been angered, saddened  
and deeply disappointed - but we have not turned away,  
we have left neither Christ nor his Church.

We are here tonight!

Like the women we have come to the tomb  
and the angels' message  
to Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Mary the mother of James,  
is the message for us as well:  
*Do not seek the living one among the dead!*

Seek the truth that brings life  
and you will find the Risen Lord.  
Seek the integrity that weathers insult  
and you will find the Risen Lord.  
Seek the faith that makes you strong  
and you will find the Risen Lord.  
Seek the peace that only God can give  
and you will find the Risen Lord.

**At Easter we celebrate our faith in Jesus  
whose life, whose love, whose trust was stronger than death.  
Seek the Risen Lord and remain with him  
- and with your sisters and brothers in the Church.  
Seek the Risen Christ in everything and everyone in the Church  
that breathes and speaks and sings and does the truth  
of Christ living among us even now!**

**For we are nothing less than the Body of Christ  
and if in him we have strength to conquer even death itself,  
then we have strength, too, for every trial that comes our way.**

*Do not seek the living one among the dead!  
He is risen as he said!*

**This is not nonsense - it is good news:  
believe it with all your heart!**

*- Rev. Austin H. Fleming*