



Easter Vigil 2021

Dear friends

For my fifth birthday I was given a party at my grandparent's house. As family and friends, we gathered around the most wonderful cake I had ever seen in my life. I had seen the design in the Co-operative bakery window. Now, to my utter delight, here it was, in pride of place, at the centre of the table.

The cake was shaped like a fairground carrousel. It has little iced horses on red and white poles beneath a fancy canopy. In between the horses were five candles nestled neatly in the deep sponge base. Only when it was too late did anyone realise the horses and canopy were just very lightly iced cardboard. In the time it took to sing the opening words of *'Happy Birthday,'* the whole cake was on fire.

On this holy night, the greatest celebration of the Christian year begins with a fire. Bringing light out of darkness, the Easter Vigil fire is a powerful symbol of Christ's resurrection. The new flame casts its radiance upon us. Our faces aglow, it reminds us that we have risen with Christ. Our baptism certificate is a page from His saving life story. We share and reflect His glory. Our hearts and minds are bright with His Spirit. From the darkest tomb God kindles a fire that will never go out.

Of course, this has been a week of fires. Just two nights ago there was another fire, a charcoal fire burning outside the High Priest's palace. While the Lord Jesus was interrogated inside, Peter sat close by this fire, warming himself in the cold of the night. As the light caught his face it made Peter identifiable. First to a maid, then to stranger, and lastly to a servant. Each thought they recognised him: *Wasn't he in the garden with Him? Wasn't he one of His disciples? Surely he was with Him?* It was a fire of denial. As the cock crew, how scorching that flame must have been for Peter, the truth too hot to handle.

Then there was another fire, the first Easter bonfire, a fire of mercy and love, a fire of forgiveness and friendship. It was lit by the Lord Jesus on the shoreline, by the Sea of Tiberias. The disciples were out fishing. Gradually, they recognised the figure on the beach. Coming close, climbing out of their boats, they met the Risen Lord. He had

prepared their breakfast. Bread and fish, by now a familiar menu. Beside this reconciling fire, in the light of a new day, Peter received again the invitation to love and to follow. It was a fire of life and joy.

The flame of our Paschal Candle stands in direct continuity with those first Easter fires. In its light we proclaim that Jesus Christ died once for all, to sin so that, we too, might consider ourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in him. As stubble is burnt away to rejuvenate the crop, so the fire of resurrection revitalises the Church. It recommissions us for missionary discipleship: *Why look for someone who is alive among the dead? The Lord Jesus has risen as he said.* For Christians, Easter is not a day. It is a way of life. It is the way to life.

For the next fifty days the new light of Easter will burn brightly from the paschal candle. This *pillar of fire* banishes the darkness of sin and glows to the honour of our God. It has no purpose but to spend itself for the glory of the Risen Christ. Like our bodies, it is marked with the cross, with the signs of beginning and of ending. Its dating reflects our lifespan. Its studs connect Christ's wounds with ours. The incense within them signifies his prayerful offering to the Father to which we are united in worship and praise. The flame is the living fire of the Lord Jesus' love, burning inextinguishably within us.

Christ yesterday and today, the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega all time belongs to him, to him be glory and power.

We are, individually and together, the paschal candle. The whole purpose of our existence is to be ablaze in Christ Jesus, forever risen and alive. Alleluia.

[The Hope Within You](#)

Homilies, Reflections, Pastoral Letters, Messages and Articles on the Catholic Faith and Christian Life – Archbishop John Wilson