

## EASTER VIGIL HOMILIES



# Easter Vigil Homilies

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Pope Francis*



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# “God Precedes Us and Loves Us First”

## *Homily for the Easter Vigil*

METROPOLITAN CATHEDRAL, BUENOS AIRES

APRIL 22, 2000

A while ago, at the entrance to this cathedral, we proclaimed that Jesus Christ was yesterday, is today, and will always be, while we carved the numbers of this year into the paschal candle, a symbol of the risen Christ. This gesture that the church has been repeating for centuries is the bold announcement, throughout history, of what happened that Sunday morning in the cemetery in Jerusalem: the one who existed before Abraham, the one who wanted to become a companion on the journey with us, the Good Samaritan who tends to our wounds when we are beaten by life and by our fragile freedom, the one who died and was buried and sealed in his tomb—he is risen and lives forever.

This was the announcement to those women, surprised that the stone that was rolled away, from the angel sitting in the place where the dead man had been. An announcement that, from that moment, was transmitted person to person throughout the history of humanity. An announcement that boldly proclaims that, from now on, inside every

death there is a seed of resurrection. The darkness we were in at the beginning of this liturgy is nothing but a symbol of sin and death. And then the light is Christ, the spark of hope that comes into our situations and our hearts, even those plunged in the greatest darkness.

The angel dispels the women's fear: "Do not be afraid" (Matt 28:5). He is talking about that instinctive fear of any hope for happiness and life, the fear that what I am seeing or what they tell me is not true, the fear of joy that is given to us is really a wasted gift. And then, after the calming reassurance not to be afraid, the sending: "Go and tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you'" (Mark 16:7).

It is the Lord who always precedes us, the Lord who waits for us. The apostle John, when he wanted to explain what love is, had to resort to the experience of how it feels to be looked for, to be awaited: "In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us" first (1 John 4:10). Even if in our lives, in one way or another, we seek God, the deepest truth is that we are sought by him, we are awaited by him. Like the almond blossom mentioned by the prophets because it is the first to blossom, so it is with the Lord: he waits first, he "firsts" us in love.

For centuries our God has gone ahead of us in love. Two thousand years ago Jesus "preceded us" and awaited us in Galilee, that Galilee of the first encounter, that Galilee that each one of us has somewhere in our hearts. Our awareness of being awaited and expected quickens the pace of our walk, in order to hasten the encounter. The same God who "loved us first" is also the Good Samaritan who becomes a neighbor to us and tells us—as at the end of that parable—"Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37). It's as simple as that: do what he did. "First" your brothers and sisters in love. Do not



expect to be loved. Love first. Take the first step. Those steps that will wake us up from our drowsiness (that kept us from watching with him) or from any sophisticated quietism. A step of reconciliation, a step of love. Take the first step in your family, take the first step in this city. Become neighbor to those who live on the margins of what is necessary to survive; every day there are more. Let us imitate our God who precedes us and loves us first, by making gestures of closeness to our brothers and sisters who suffer loneliness, indigence, loss of work, exploitation, lack of shelter, disdain for being migrants, sickness, isolation in their old age. Take the first step and, by your own life, bring the announcement: he is risen. When you do you will light, in the midst of so much death, a spark of resurrection, which he wants you to bring. Then your profession of faith will be credible.

On this Easter night, I ask our Mother to help us understand what it means to “first” others in love. I ask her, who was awakened by hope, to help us not to be afraid to announce, with our words and with our gestures of neighborliness toward those who are weakest, that he is alive in our midst. May she, as a good mother, lead us by the hand to the silent adoration of the God who precedes us in love. May it be so.