



DIocese OF ST. AUGUSTINE

Office of the Bishop

To the Faithful of the Diocese of St. Augustine,

Just a few weeks ago – more than 500 people gathered with me at the Cathedral Basilica of St. Augustine for the Rites of Election. These catechumens and candidates accompanied by many of their pastors and deacons have been preparing for the final leg of their journey of faith when they will receive the sacraments of initiation.

On Holy Saturday, at the Easter Vigil, men, women and children are initiated into the Church celebrating their baptism, confirmation, and the first reception of the Holy Eucharist with us. And celebrating with them that evening, and throughout the day on Easter Sunday, all of us renew our baptismal promises.

This year because of the extraordinary circumstances surrounding the coronavirus pandemic, we will not be able to gather in our churches. Nevertheless, there is a reason for hope.

When God chose Moses and directed him to go to the Pharaoh – he paused and asked God – who am I to do this? God assures Moses – to not fear: I will be with you. When Gabriel visits Mary to tell her she will have the child Jesus – the message from God is the same: Do not be afraid – you have found favor with God. And when the disciples seemed doomed by a terrible storm – they hear Jesus speak the same words: Do not be afraid, it is I.

In the liturgy for the Easter Vigil, there is a powerful prayer: “May this day inflame us with new hope. May the Light of Christ dispel the darkness of our hearts and minds.” Indeed, this year we need to hear the words: “May the Light of Christ dispel darkness. Do not be afraid.”

The scripture readings for the Easter Vigil are remarkable – they trace the entire sacred story of salvation – from the moment of creation through the birth of Christ and the marvel of God’s beloved Son’s passion, death and resurrection. We learn in the history of our salvation, the delight that God takes in us, that he rescues and saves us, that we can call upon him, that he remains near to us, and that he continually creates anew our hearts.

This Easter is so different for all of us – affecting all generations. But the message is the same: Do not be afraid.

On Easter morning, one of the beautiful Gospels is when Mary of Magdalen discovers the empty tomb – and Peter and the beloved disciple, John, rush to find him. May we continue our search for him in our lives – indeed, rush to find him in new and unique ways.

May the words of the Easter proclamation speak and echo every day in our lives: May Easter inflame in us new hope. May the light of Christ dispel the darkness of our hearts and minds. May we hear Christ speak to us now – do not be afraid, it is I. The Father assures us, as he did Moses – I will be with you.

I assure all of you are remembered daily in my prayers at Mass.

Truly yours,

+ r. r. Estévez

+Felipe de Jesus Estévez
Bishop of St. Augustine