

VESPERS HOMILY

13 MAY 2018

JOHN 17: 1 – 11

PSALM 68: 1 - 10, 33 – 36

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In the darkness before dawn on Easter Day many churches observe the ancient tradition of The Easter Vigil. Scripture tells us that in that predawn darkness women went to the tomb where Jesus lay.

The service begins in darkness. A new fire is kindled and the light of that fire breaks the darkness, the first light of Easter. From that fire a tall candle, the Paschal Candle is lighted.

The priest or the Deacon, carries that candle into the darkened church, chanting or singing three times, “The Light of Christ.” The candle is placed, an ancient hymn called the “Exultet” is chanted or sung, and the lights of candles on the altar and throughout the church are lighted; the church is filled with the warmth and light of the presence of Jesus.

The light speaks to us of His presence.

It is an ancient assurance. In the very beginning of the Book of Genesis God creates light. In the first chapter of his Gospel John writes of Jesus as “The Word” incarnate, in whom was life and the life was “The light of men.” John tells us that that light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

In this evening’s reading we have used the word “glory” a few times. What does it mean? It means the revelation of the presence of God. The revelation is light.

Moses confronts God in a burning bush or atop Mount Sinai and in each instance he is transfigured by the light of God reflected in his face. The shining presence of God is in the Holy of Holies in the Temple in Jerusalem.

God reveals Himself to Jesus and three sleepy disciples in the Mount of Transfiguration and Jesus is changed, radiating light.

The “Glory” of God is revealed in The Son who is the “Word” and The “Light.”

This reading from John begins with “After Jesus had spoken these words....”

What words exactly? Jesus had been talking, addressing His Disciples for three chapters.

The words spoken are spoken at what we call the “Last Supper” as are all the words in Jesus “Last Discourse.” Jesus instructs those at the table

That, of course, is the point. This seventeenth chapter of John’s Gospel is very much part of what is called Jesus’ “Last Discourse;” it’s the conclusion. Jesus looks on His earthly ministry as in the past.

In what may be called the “High Priestly Prayer” the glorified Jesus is returning to the Father with a prayer for the union of God and humanity. Jesus is consecrating His body and blood for the sacrifice He will become and giving His benediction to the church that will come to be through His glorification,

Jesus lifts up His eyes to heaven seeking the source of His own glory. Visualize Him in the upper room with His Disciples. His discourse becomes prayer.

Jesus has glorified the Father by revealing Him in all the words and actions of His own life, Now the Father will glorify Him in the resurrection and ascension by which He will return to the glory of His preincarnational state He possessed for all eternity.

He has accomplished His work of revealing the Father. His human nature that He assumed here will be glorified there in the Father’s presence.

The ones who have received Jesus are the ones chosen by the Father. Those chosen believers will be the property of both the Father and the incarnate Son. The first object of Jesus’ prayer is for their protection. What will become of the sheep when the shepherd is leaving?

Jesus asks that they be protected as He had protected them “In the name you have given me.”

I have made rather liberal use of the word “Glory.” What does it mean? If you seek that meaning in the Scriptures you may well find it linked with the word “Shekinah.”

Shekinah is not to be found in the Bible; it’s a Rabbinic word. It means “settling” or “dwelling.” It speaks of the revelation of the presence of God.

God settles or dwells with the Jews in a burning bush, in a cloud by day and a fire by night, and, above all, in the Ark of the tabernacle and in the Holy of Holies in the Temple in Jerusalem. God is present in the transfigured face of Jesus. In those things we and they see the Glory of God.

God reveals His presence with a transfiguring light that penetrates and breaks the darkness of the predawn each Easter, here.

In His Holy Name.