

# Let message of Jesus 'be your hope' in this difficult time, says bishop

WASHINGTON (CNS) – This year in U.S. dioceses, the celebration of welcoming catechumens and candidates into the Catholic Church has been postponed until the coronavirus pandemic has been brought under control and states' stay-at-home orders are lifted and churches are once again opened.

But at Easter Vigil Masses across the country April 11, catechumens and candidates who have been preparing for weeks to join the church or enter full communion with the church were never far from the minds of bishops who celebrated Mass livestreamed from nearly empty churches.

"This evening, as we come together virtually, I am feeling the absence of all of you on this festive occasion," Bishop Robert P. Deeley of Portland, Maine, said to thousands of congregants participating via the internet, watching the livestream of him celebrating the Easter Vigil at Cathedral of Immaculate Conception in Portland.

"But, in a special way, this evening's celebration was going to be a unique moment for our catechumens and candidates here in the cathedral and throughout the diocese," he continued. "They are the people who help us to know the wonder of the faith we have as they seek to share it."

During Holy Week, in a message to this group, which numbered close to 100, he told them that he "shared in their disappointment that we cannot baptize, confirm and welcome them to holy Communion."

"I invited them to: 'Let the message of Jesus be your hope, particularly in this difficult moment, in this time of

disappointment as your journey to the sacraments is delayed," he continued. "Reflect on the way in which the Lord Jesus has guided this journey. He has accompanied you and will remain with you. The hope you place in him, the trust you give him as you seek to follow him will joyfully be celebrated, along with your witness to the faith that is ours, when we are able to be together once again.'"

"I just want all of them to know that they hold a special place in my thoughts and prayers this evening," he added.

Bishop Deeley told the congregation that their virtual gathering on the vigil centered "our attention and our consideration on the mystery at the heart of the Christian faith. It is a simple statement we make, but it is extraordinary and powerful."

"It was so astounding that even the disciples and the apostles Jesus had spoken to about it had difficulty believing it even when it happened. It shattered all their concepts of life. 'Christ is Risen,' says it all."

The Easter Vigil Mass always begins in a dark church that gradually is filled with hundreds of flickering candles lit from a large paschal candle that symbolizes Jesus, the light of the world. U.S. Catholics this year experienced this virtually as well.

In the Diocese of Arlington, Virginia, thousands from across the diocese and beyond, perhaps holding their own candles in front of flickering computer screens, were able to experience the Easter Vigil's moving service of light, and hear the readings, music and solemn chants.

They could see the spring flowers that filled the sanctuary of the Cathedral of St. Thomas More in Arlington, even if they couldn't smell the incense.

Bishop Michael F. Burbidge noted the Mass "began in darkness,

symbolizing the darkness in our world, nation and lives. Acknowledging the darkness is a moment of grace, if it leads us to a deeper reliance on God and a firm belief in his power to make all things new, as proclaimed in the readings this evening.”

At the beginning of the liturgy, “we blessed the Easter fire and lit the paschal candle; symbolizing that Jesus Christ, by his cross and resurrection, was not defeated but conquered the power of sin, darkness, suffering and even death. Thus, the words of the Easter Proclamation, sung beautifully by our deacon, made this exhortation: Exult, let all corners of the earth be glad ... for we stand in the awesome glory of Christ’s holy light.

Noting that “we need some good news,” proclaimed the Easter message that the resurrected Jesus is alive and with us.

“This is the truth we celebrate on this sacred night and throughout the Easter season and it is not changed by any situation or crisis,” Bishop Burbidge said. “It is the good news that allows us to sing, even at this difficult moment: ‘Alleluia, Alleluia.’”

In Baltimore at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen April 11, Archbishop William E. Lori called his virtual congregation to be “infected” with the new and risen life of Jesus.

In his homily at the vigil, he said we should all want to end up on the right side of history – not to be unblinkingly in step with the times – but to strive with the help of God’s grace to be on that side of history which God has written and continues to write.

“Our hearts must be in tune with God’s plan,” he said.

“In this great Easter Vigil, a fair amount of what we call salvation history is on display. It is presented not just to inform us about the past but to give us hope and trust. Hope

and trust in the Lord who created the world in love, hope and trust in the Lord who redeemed the world with still greater love," the archbishop said.

"How important it is for you and me to cling to this hope and to do so at a time when it's easy to lose hope, to sink into depression and maybe to see life as absurd. This vigil traces out how God accompanied his people throughout history and in the process revealed his loving plan for the salvation of the world."

"Our vigil traces how even now the Lord is guiding us, you and me, through the storms of history, including and especially the destructiveness of COVID-19," he said.