This is the Night of Hope

April 15, 2006 (The Great Vigil of Easter)

This is the night.

This is the night we are delivered from gloom and sin. This is the night we are set free from captivity. This is the night God asks us, "Can these bones live?" This is the night God asks us, "Prophesy, that these bones might live." This is the night. This is the night when Christ broke the bonds of death and hell, and rose victorious from the grave.

This is the night of Hope.

The hope of resurrection. The hope that the captive shall be set free, the hope that the circle shall be unbroken, the hope that death shall give way to life.

This is the night of Hope.

Hope stands there with Faith and Love; it is the forgotten little sister among these three virtues.

Love stands enormously tall among her sisters, a little confused, often misunderstood, the greatest and eldest virtue, celebrated in song, in life, in romance, in fellowship, in prayer.

Faith is perhaps the tough middle sister, her certainty mistaken for bossiness, she is intimidating to some people, but also a steadfast friend – not always easy to know at first, but the steady friend you call in a crisis.

But Hope, little Hope, it is hard to hear her voice over the noisy din of the world. She is not tall like her eldest sister she is not strong-voiced like her little sister. If I were to paint a picture of her, she would be holding a light, she would be holding this Paschal candle.

People think she is naïve, an optimist, a fool. But don't confuse Hope with naïveté, or optimism – those are siblings of Ignorance, not of Love.

If you are naïve or optimistic about the world you don't need hope. You've put on your rose-colored glasses, and believe that all is beautiful and in perfect working order.

Noah's family in their ark, the Israelites fleeing Egypt, Ezekiel in the valley of Dry Bones --they were not naïve. They knew the world was broken, that violence and exile and death hemmed them in like towering waves of the Red Sea. Palestine. Israel. The Sudan. Eritrea. Iraq. New Orleans. Even, sometimes especially, Newton, Auburndale.

Don't confuse Hope with naïveté, or optimism. She knows the world is a difficult place. She sees the shadows, and she holds this Paschal Candle before those shadows.

She sees the shadows, and the shadows offer us only despair or ignorance. She sees the shadows, and she holds this Paschal Candle before those shadows.

Thanks be to God for Hope and her candle!

God said to Ezekiel "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.'

To lose hope is to lose life.

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But Hope carries her paschal candle, and Hope brings that light into the shadows; into the valley of the shadow of death she carries this paschal candle.

She carries this paschal candle, and she stands beside the living water, the water of baptism the water that parted to bring the Israelites to freedom, the water of the Jordan in which Christ was baptized, the water in which you were baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, the holy Trinity, One God.

Hope stands by that living water, and she whispers by this baptismal font the words of the great Anglican, Episcopalian, mystic, Julian of Norwich: All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.

So when the news on the television overwhelms you with despair, when ignorance insists that there is nothing you can do to help your sister, your brother in need; when despair tells you to turn your back on the world, when ignorance insists that you are worth nothing to God, when despair crushes you with sadness, makes the laughter of friends sound hollow; when ignorance insists that you are worth nothing; when despair keeps you from coming to pray with friends, when ignorance insists that you don't need community; when despair and ignorance cast their long shadows over you and your family…

Have Hope.

Have hope, because this is the night we are delivered from gloom and sin. Have Hope: This is the night we are set free from captivity. This is the night God says to us: O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live**…**

This is the night, this is the night, This is the night when Christ broke the bonds of death and hell, and rose victorious from the grave.

Have Hope.

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