

April 16, 2017 Easter Vigil Homily: Brothers and sisters, in the year 1815 a promising young English writer, Mary Shelley, penned a novel which is considered by many critics, past and present, to be a literary masterpiece. It is the Gothic horror tale, "*Frankenstein*". What you might find surprising is that, in writing the novel the author was undoubtedly influenced by a rather strange phenomenon of the time: body snatching. Grave robbers acting as mercenaries prowled cemeteries seeking a supply of fresh corpses. And how does one account for such ghoulish, macabre acts of vandalism? In a word, science. The robbers sold the corpses to eager scientists who, in turn, conducted medical experiments on the cadavers. Some scientists, excited about the prospects newly discovered electricity afforded, were of the view that an electrical current was just what was needed to reawaken the dead.

Now fast forward to the year 2002. In that year the legendary hall of fame baseball player Ted Williams died. Immediately after his death, his son insisted that his corpse be frozen in the uncertain hope that that he could be brought back to life someday. Hope springs eternal! For at least the last three centuries, scientists have been seeking a remedy for death. To say the least, solving the riddle of our mortality has been a formidable challenge for our brightest minds. Yet they continue to draw blanks.

On this night of the Easter Vigil the Church boldly proclaims that indeed a remedy has been found. In Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead, death has been overcome. By his glorious resurrection, Our Blessed Lord broke the prison bars of death. Recall the old memorial acclamation at Sunday mass: "Dying you destroyed our death, rising you restored our life". In St. Paul's letter to the Christian community at Rome, he writes, "We know that Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more; death no longer has power over him". St. Paul's triumphant words led the late Bishop Sheen to declare that it was not Christ who died on the cross, it was death that died.

The question arises what would it mean if the resurrection of Jesus had not taken place? The story of Jesus would have ended on a Friday afternoon. His body would have decomposed and he would likely have been forgotten a generation later. But the Father, the creator of all that exists, raised up Jesus. In Jesus, the words of the psalmist are realized, "You will not let your Holy One see corruption". (Ps.16:10) He gave life back to Christ, a new and glorious life, and in Him, gives life to the world.

In the epistle reading on Easter Sunday morning from the Acts of the Apostles, we heard the words of the Apostle Peter, "This man God raised on the third day". One of the most remarkable and consoling messages of Easter is that death does not have the final word nor does evil have the final say. Death is not an exit into nothingness. The tomb is no longer frightening because it is empty. Christ did not remain in the tomb. He belongs to the world of the living. In the Resurrection of Jesus, the astonishing prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled: "He (God) will destroy death forever". (Is.25:8).

Recently, on Palm Sunday, forty-five Coptic Christians were murdered by terrorists in Egypt. Perhaps the misguided criminals considered their despicable act a victory of sorts. After all, only infidels were killed! Such was their warped state of mind. If so, they are sadly mistaken. We recall St. Paul's words, "Are you not aware that we who are baptized into Christ are baptized into

his death. We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we, too, might live in newness of life. For if we have grown into union with him through a death like his, we shall also be united with him in the resurrection". (Rom.6:3-5)

In the Risen Christ, we are assured of victory. Death is our passover to a new and glorious life!

Amen!