

HOLY SATURDAY: EASTER VIGIL

Genesis = JEN-uh-sihs

The beautiful story of Creation! Proclaim with authority. Do not rush. Use strong eye contact as you proclaim. Articulate every word so that no word is lost. Rehearse this reading often for a polished presentation.

abyss = uh-BIS

Read with renewed energy each time you say "Then God said."

LECTIONARY #41

READING I Genesis 1:1—2:2

A reading from the Book of Genesis

[In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth,] the earth was a **formless wasteland**, and darkness covered the abyss, while a mighty wind swept over the waters.

Then God said,

"**Let there be light**," and there was light.

God saw how good the light was.

God then **separated** the light from the darkness.

God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night."

Thus evening came, and **morning followed**—the first day.

Then God said,

"Let there be a dome in the middle of the waters, to **separate** one body of water from the other."

And so it happened:

God made the dome,

and it separated the water **above** the dome from the water below it.

God called the dome "**the sky**."

Evening came, and **morning followed**—the second day.

Then God said,

"Let the **water** under the sky be gathered into a **single** basin, so that the **dry** land may appear." >>

There are options for readings today. Ask your parish staff which ones will be used.

READING I **Genesis 1:1—2.2.** The readings of the Easter Vigil

move from the poetic account of creation to the testing of Abraham, to Israel's deliverance from Egypt, and to beautiful hope-filled prophetic promises. The readings immerse us in the great moments in the story of salvation. After these dramatic traditions from the Old Testament, the New

Testament readings culminate in the Gospel, long prepared for and wondrously fulfilled in Jesus' Passover from death to life. The readings that begin with creation conclude with the new creation manifest in Jesus' Resurrection.

The first reading is rhythmically ordered around six days of creation and a final day of divine rest. Like other ancient creation accounts, this one is not a scientific or historical treatise. It is a sacred text, an expression of the faith of Israel that announces the sovereignty and uniqueness

of God. In contrast with the myths of other cultures, there is no cosmic battle, no pantheon of competing gods, no evil. The distinctiveness of the first chapter of Genesis is the power of the one God who has made all of creation—both time and space—and has made it good. The account is designed so that every generation can learn of a God who accomplishes everything simply by divine speech, is infinitely creative and powerful, and brings about only what is good. For their part, people are to recognize their duty of reverence to this God,

Read with renewed energy each time you say
"Then God said."

And so it happened:

the water under the sky was **gathered** into its basin,
and the dry **land appeared**.

God called the dry land "**the earth**,"

and the basin of the water he called "**the sea**."

God saw how good it was.

Then God **said**,

"Let the earth bring **forth vegetation**:

every kind of **plant** that bears seed

and every kind of fruit **tree** on earth

that bears fruit with its seed in it."

And so it happened:

the earth **brought forth** every kind of plant that bears seed

and every kind of **fruit tree** on earth

that bears fruit with its **seed** in it.

God saw how good it was.

Evening came, and morning **followed**—the third day.

Then God **said**:

"Let there be lights in the dome of the sky,

to separate **day** from **night**.

Let them mark the **fixed times**, the **days** and the **years**,

and serve as luminaries in the dome of the sky,

to shed light upon the earth."

And so it happened:

God made the two great lights,

the **greater** one to **govern** the day,

and the **lesser** one to govern the night;

and he made the stars.

God **set** them in the **dome** of the sky,

to shed light upon the earth,

to **govern** the **day** and the **night**,

and to **separate** the **light** from the **darkness**.

God saw how good it was.

Evening came, and **morning** followed—the fourth day.

their responsibility of stewardship over creation, the dignity that God has given to them, and their sharing in God's own rest on the seventh day. This poetic opening chapter of the Old Testament enhances the atmosphere of wonder and awe, so fitting for the Easter Vigil.

The structure of the story contributes to the image of a God who orders creation according to a plan, establishing everything in harmony. Each day begins with God speaking: "Then God said," followed by God's command, accomplished immedi-

ately. God says only "Let there be light," and there was light! For each element of creation, God sees that it is good, and then gives a name to the newly created reality, beginning with the names "day" and "night." Then, almost as a musical antiphon, God's creative act is concluded, "Evening came, and morning followed—the first day." The pattern creates a peaceful rhythm.

Along with other biblical texts that reflect on creation (for example, Proverbs 8 and Psalms 33 and 104), Genesis 1 explains that God is the cause of all of the

rhythms and diversity of life that we see and experience: night and day, rain water and sea water, plants and animals, sun and moon, and humanity itself. God's actions on the first five days create a world of time and space filled with God's own goodness. On the sixth day God creates male and female in the divine image and gives to them both blessing and responsibility. Thus, before the entry of sin and hostility into the world, God entrusts to humanity the task of keeping the world in the divinely established harmony.

Read with renewed energy each time you say
"Then God said."

Then God said,

"Let the water **teem** with an **abundance** of **living creatures**,
and on the earth let birds fly beneath the dome of the sky."

And so it happened:

God created the **great sea monsters**
and **all kinds of swimming** creatures with which the
water **teems**,
and all kinds of winged **birds**.

God saw how good it was, and God blessed them, saying,
"Be **fertile, multiply**, and fill the water of the seas;
and let the birds multiply on the earth."

Evening came, and **morning** followed—the fifth day.

Then God said,

"Let the earth bring **forth** all kinds of **living creatures**:
cattle, creeping things, and wild **animals** of all **kinds**."

And so it happened:

God made **all kinds** of wild animals, all kinds of **cattle**,
and all kinds of **creeping things** of the earth.

God saw how good it was.

Then [God said:

"Let us make man in **our image**, after our **likeness**.

Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea,
the birds of the air, and the **cattle**,
and over all the wild animals
and all the creatures that crawl on the ground."

God **created** man in **his** image;
in the image of **God** he **created** him;
male and female he created them.

God **blessed** them, saying:

"Be **fertile and multiply**;
fill the earth and **subdue** it.

Have **dominion over** the fish of the sea, the birds of the air,
and **all the living things** that move on the earth." »

TO KEEP IN MIND

Repetition of the same word or phrase over the course of a reading emphasizes a point. Make each instance distinct, and build your intensity with each repetition.

Then God rests, creating rest itself on the seventh day. Since men and women are created in God's image, the seventh day is to be a day of rest (*menuha*) for them as well. On the Sabbath, humanity is to share in God's own peace, serenity, and tranquility. Creation itself, both time and space, is ordered to this day of rest. So important is this day that the creation account concludes with God blessing the day (a verse unfortunately not included in the lectionary): "God blessed the seventh day and made it holy"

(Genesis 2:3). This final blessing is the culmination of the creation account.

READING II

Genesis 22:1-18. Omitted from the readings on this night are a few other episodes in the history of salvation. After the creation account, characterized by harmony and goodness, the next chapters of Genesis present a world increasingly filled with sin and estrangement from God. Though created in God's image and likeness, men and women did not reflect God's own good-

ness. In this context of alienation, God steps into the story. The **LORD** speaks to a seventy-five-year-old childless man named Abram: "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you" (12:2). This call initiates the saga of Abram, whose name God will change to Abraham, "father of a multitude." He is to be the means of God extending the divine blessing: "All the families of the earth shall find blessing in you" (12:3). This promise appears with no strings attached; God does not ask Abram to perform specific acts or rituals, but simply to trust in the

God also said:

“See, I give you every seed-bearing plant all over the earth and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit on it to be your food; and to all the animals of the land, all the birds of the air, and all the living creatures that crawl on the ground, I give all the green plants for food.”

And so it happened.

God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good.]

Evening came, and morning followed—the sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth and all their array were completed.

Since on the seventh day God was finished with the work he had been doing, he rested on the seventh day from all the work he had undertaken.

[Shorter: Genesis 1:1, 26–31a (see brackets)]

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 104:1–2, 5–6, 10, 12, 13–14, 24, 35 (30)

R. Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth.

Bless the LORD, O my soul!

O LORD, my God, you are great indeed!
You are clothed with majesty and glory,
robed in light as with a cloak.

You fixed the earth upon its foundation,
not to be moved forever;
with the ocean, as with a garment, you
covered it;
above the mountains the waters stood.

You send forth springs into the watercourses
that wind among the mountains.
Beside them the birds of heaven dwell;
from among the branches they send forth
their song.

You water the mountains from your palace;
the earth is replete with the fruit
of your works.

You raise grass for the cattle,
and vegetation for man's use,
producing bread from the earth.

How manifold are your works, O LORD!
In wisdom you have wrought them all—
the earth is full of your creatures.
Bless the LORD, O my soul!

Or:

promise. Trust will be needed, since Abram and his wife, Sarai, continue to wait for the promised descendant. When God again comes to Abram in a vision, Abram moans, “What good will your gifts be, if I keep on being childless?” (15:2). Expanding on the original promise, God makes a covenant with Abram, announcing that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars. Trusting in the promise, Abram puts his faith in God, who does fulfill the promise, giving a son, Isaac, to Abram and Sarai in their old age.

In the second reading for the Easter Vigil, God puts Abraham to the test. Throughout the Abraham cycle, he faces numerous tests, with this account, regarded in the Jewish tradition as the tenth and final test of Abraham's faith. Having waited so long to bring about the promise of a descendant, now God commands Abraham to take his beloved son and sacrifice him as a burnt offering. Abraham's response sounds almost wooden as he rises early, saddles a donkey, and even cuts wood for

the sacrifice, careful actions performed with a kind of numbness and shock.

We hear nothing of Isaac's reaction to his father's actions, until, having the altar of sacrifice prepared, he asks, “Father, . . . where is the sheep for the holocaust?” Abraham sorrowfully tells him. “God himself will provide (*elohim yir'e*) the sheep for the holocaust.” The God who had provided a son to the elderly couple will, somehow, again provide. When they reach their destination, Abraham continues his numbed actions: he builds an altar, lays the wood,