



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

## **The Easter Vigil Year A**

### ***The eternal flame***

*Readings: Genesis 1:1-2:2, Ps 103, Genesis 22:1-18, Ps 15, Exodus 14:15-15:1, Exodus 15:1-6, 17-18, Isaiah 54:5-14, Ps 29, Isaiah 55:1-11, Ps 12, Baruch 3:9-15, 32-4:4, Ps 18, Ezekiel 36:16-28, Pss 41, 42, Romans 6:3-11, Ps 117, Matthew 28: 1-10*

In the year 1453 the last Christian Emperor of the East rode out to his death from the walls of Constantinople into the murderous hands of the Ottoman army. His last place of prayer and dedication to Christ was the church of St Saviour in Chora. Built as a monastery in the 4<sup>th</sup> century it became the treasure house of some of the finest mosaics in Christendom. It is currently closed under the diktat of Mr. Erdogan, the persecutory leader of Turkey, while it is converted into a mosque. What will remain of its beauty and witness only time will tell but, for my money it contains possibly the most beautiful ikon of the Resurrection ever written. It is a picture of Christ, not in the garden encountering the Magdalene, nor rising triumphantly from the tomb while the dumbstruck soldiers flee, nor in the breaking of bread at Emmaus. The ikon is of that hidden work of Holy Saturday. The work upon which our salvation depends. It is the Harrowing of Hell.

In it the dynamic Christ, but for the wounds almost unrecognisable from the tortured corpus hung upon the Cross, has battered His way into Satan's domain of sin and death. He stands upon the shattered doors of Hell, laid cruciform beneath His royal feet. Chained under it all lies the master of the dark, Satan, bound and finished. Behind Jesus, King David and Solomon, His ancestors, stand in joyful approbation. Moses, Abel and the three survivors of the fiery furnace watch in exultation. Jesus Himself reaches down into the realm of the dead, into the tombs of Adam and Eve, the place of our otherwise fallen and lost humanity. And they reach up to Him as He seizes them and wrenches them free of the defeated powers of darkness and death. Note only this, as the whole scene is bathed in the heavenly light and night is scattered. Christ does not hold them by the hand but by the wrist. The ikon writer reminds us that we are not dragged clear of damnation and destruction by our own efforts but by the sovereign power and grace of Christ alone.

That is what tonight celebrates, the new fire, the eternal flame, the waters of death and life, the bread of the pilgrim journey and the chalice of salvation.

Heirs of mortality and the grave as sons of Adam and daughters of Eve, we are ransomed from the dark, salvaged from the tomb, redeemed from slavery by the victorious and triumphant Lord of Glory whose sacrifice is our salvation.

All glory and honour and praise and thanksgiving be to the Lord Jesus Christ. Hallelujah.