
A priest in white vestments is lighting a large bonfire at night. He holds a long, glowing log that extends from a large metal fire pit on the right towards the center. A group of people, including children in white robes, are gathered around, watching the ceremony. The scene is illuminated by the bright orange and yellow flames of the fire, creating a warm and dramatic atmosphere against the dark night.

On this,  
your night  
of grace,

© holy Father,




accept this candle,  
a solemn offering,

Each year as the sun sets on the eve of the first Sunday after the full moon after the vernal equinox, Christians around the world gather to light and bless a fire. The flame from that fire ignites a candle—the Paschal Candle—which then leads a procession into a darkened church. From that single candle, all who gather light individual candles.

Standing next to this pillar of fire, the deacon sings the great Easter Proclamation, the *Exsultet*. This ancient hymn recounts God's saving hand throughout history. It celebrates that night when Christ broke the chains of death and rose triumphantly from the grave.

Lighting a candle to mark significant and life changing moments, however, is not unique to the Easter Vigil. Think for a moment of the times when we light candles. We mark the beginning and passing of life by lighting candles on birthdays and at funerals. Flowers and candles immediately mark the site where lives were lost due to a tragedy. Peace marches are held at night in candlelight. The Olympics begin with a flame that has been carried across the globe. And in our homes, candles add warmth and romance to dinners with our beloved.

This inextricable bond between candles and the need to mark life's moments transcends nationality, race, and culture. It is an expression of what it means to be human and alive.

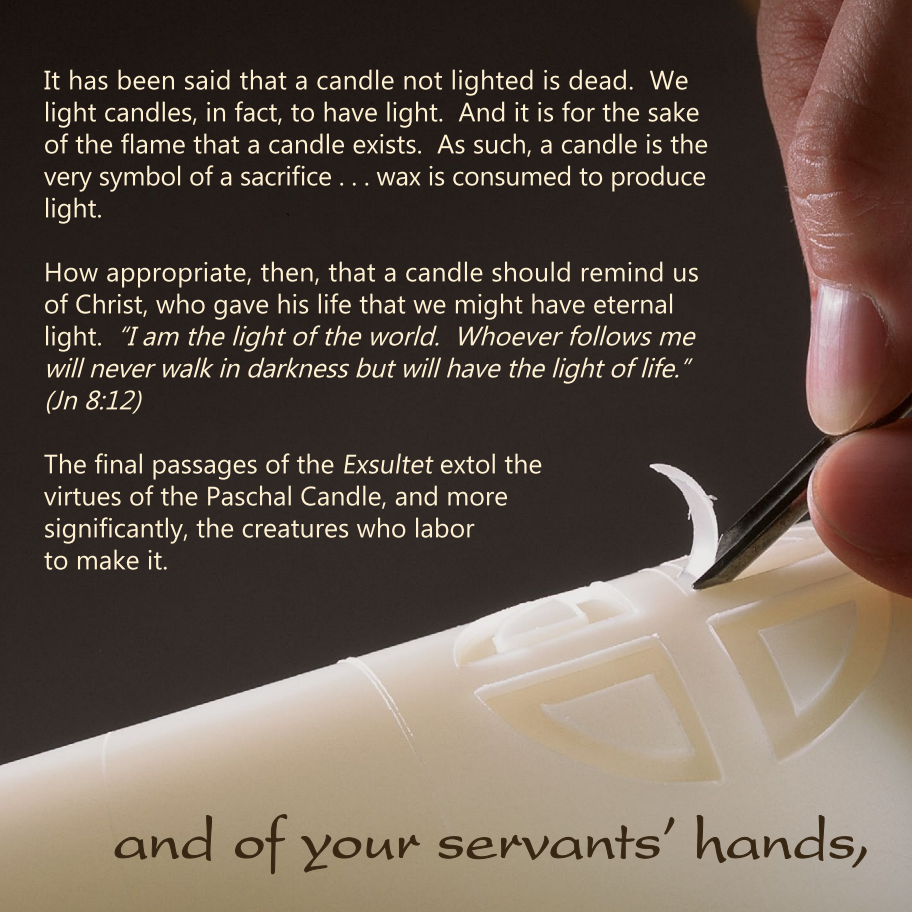


the work  
of bees

It has been said that a candle not lighted is dead. We light candles, in fact, to have light. And it is for the sake of the flame that a candle exists. As such, a candle is the very symbol of a sacrifice . . . wax is consumed to produce light.

How appropriate, then, that a candle should remind us of Christ, who gave his life that we might have eternal light. *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."* (Jn 8:12)

The final passages of the *Exsultet* extol the virtues of the Paschal Candle, and more significantly, the creatures who labor to make it.



and of your servants' hands,



*an evening sacrifice of praise,  
this gift from your most Holy Church*

*But now we know the praises  
of this pillar, which glowing  
fire ignites for God's honor,*

Speak to any beekeeper, and you will quickly learn of the virtues of the honeybee. Beeswax is an organic product, produced by the honey bee, and is relatively little known compared to the other gift—honey— which gives this creature its very name. A colony may have as many as 60,000 bees and yield hundreds of pounds of honey in a season. Yet, this same number of bees will produce only a pound or two of wax during the same time.

Only the worker (virgin) produces wax for approximately eight days in her life. She secretes waxy flakes from glands on her abdomen, which become beeswax when chewed and expectorated. The workers will use this wax to create a hexagonal cell structure, called the comb, which will serve as the hive's nursery and pantry. Into each hexagonal cell, a queen will lay an egg or a nurse bee will store nectar (its carbohydrate) or pollen (its protein). The bees build each cell at precisely 5.2 mm in diameter and work entirely in the dark.



*a fire into many flames  
divided, yet never dimmed  
by sharing of its light,*

## for it is fed by melting wax,

In the 4th century, St John Chrysostom wrote, "The bee is more honored than other animals, not because she labors, but because she labors for others."


While some native bees are solitary, the honey bee (*Apis mellifera*) is not. It survives only in a colony. It is the role-model of communal living. Tasks are undertaken by all, food is held in common, and the survival of the colony supersedes any individual's interest. The female bee loses her life if she stings another out of defense. During winter months, bees do not hibernate. Rather, they cluster around the queen and thermo-regulate the temperature of the colony. A bee will not survive apart from the cluster.

Since ancient times, the honeybee has been an iconic symbol of industriousness. The phrase, "busy as a bee" refers to the fact that the bee never sleeps. During the summer months, a bee lives for only about six weeks. The first half of her life is spent in the hive, attending to the queen, nursing the brood, and building comb. It is only in the second half of her life that she will forage, seeking nearby flora for nectar and pollen. She uses the sun as her "GPS" and can travel several miles from her hive seeking food.



Worker bees communicate the location of food stores by a special dance performed in the hive. This sophisticated dance, called a waggle dance, relays both the direction and the distance from the hive. The scientific community refers to this behavior as "evangelization".

Why not "be the bee". . . seeking that which is beautiful in the world, transforming it in our own lives, and giving back to the community something even more precious.

A photograph of a religious ceremony. A priest in a white cassock is lighting a large, ornate torch. The scene is dimly lit, with the primary light source being the flames of the torch. The priest's face is partially visible in profile on the left, wearing glasses. Another person is partially visible on the right, looking towards the torch. The background is dark, making the light from the torch stand out.

to build a  
torch so  
precious.

*-Exsultet*

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