



Homily for Easter Vigil Bishop Alan McGuckian, SJ Diocese of Down and Connor



Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

We have just had a sumptuous feast of the Word of God, spanning all of history, from the Beginning; 'In the beginning God created heaven and earth' ... to the glory of the Resurrection and new life in Christ. Through it all God provides.

God will provide the lamb

As I think of you, the thirty brothers and sisters who are to be baptised and confirmed shortly, the reading that my mind goes to first is the story of Abraham and Isaac. God asks Abraham for the ultimate sacrifice – his beloved son. As they climb Mount Moriah together, Isaac innocently asks, "Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Abraham's response reveals his deep trust: "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." How profound these words would become! Abraham's faith was not misplaced; God did provide – not a lamb but a ram, caught in the thicket. But Christians have always heard those words as a foreshadowing of how God would ultimately provide His own Son as the Lamb who takes away the sins of the world. God did provide the Lamb of sacrifice - and tonight, shortly, you will join us and take part for the first time, in the eternal sacrifice of the Lamb.

In that story God asks everything of Abraham – to give him his only son, but ultimately, it is God who provides.

In creation God provides ...

In the beginning, God spoke light into being. God created with purpose and intentionality, providing all that is necessary for life to flourish. Every day of creation reveals God's generous heart and after each act of creation, God declares it "good." All of us experience the creative, providing work of God in every moment. As Pope Benedict XVI put it so powerfully; "Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary."

From the very beginning, and in each moment of our lives, we encounter a God whose nature is to provide abundantly.

Exodus: God Provides Freedom

In Exodus, God provides for an entire people. The Israelites, enslaved and oppressed in Egypt, cry out, and God hears them. He provides Moses as their leader, provides signs and wonders to convince Pharaoh, and when all seems lost at the edge of the Red Sea, God provides a way where there seemed to be no way. The waters part, and God's people walk through on dry ground toward freedom. God provides not just physical liberation but also identity – transforming slaves into a covenant people, beloved and chosen.

A New Heart: God Provides Renewal

Through the prophets, God promises even more. Surely, we can all see ourselves in the wayward people of Israel, the apple of God's eye, who take his love for granted and behave like spoiled brats. God speaks through Ezekiel: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh." Our God loves us so intimately that He desires to free us not just from external oppression but from the internal slavery of sin. God provides not just outward blessings but inward transformation.

Baptism: Becoming New Creations

This brings us to the heart of tonight's celebration. Very soon the Catechumens will be baptised. This is not merely a symbolic ritual or a community initiation – it is a profound spiritual reality in which God provides new birth.

St. Paul explains this mystery in his letter to the Romans: "When we were baptised in Christ Jesus we were baptised in his death; in other words, when we were baptised we went into the tomb with him and joined him in death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glory, we too might live a new life."

To our catechumens, I say: What you will experience tonight is nothing less than a divine exchange – your old self for a new creation in Christ. In the waters of Baptism, you are united with Christ in his death so that you might share in his resurrection. This is God's greatest provision – not just goods or freedom or even a new heart, but a completely new identity as sons and daughters of God. You will be baptised and confirmed as a whole new creation.

Living the Baptismal Reality

But perhaps you might wonder what this Baptism will mean tomorrow, or perhaps in a few weeks' time on a dreary Monday morning when you're back at work or busy with family duties. Will anyone know you have been baptised or confirmed? Will they experience anything different, or will the newness have lost its wonder?

St. Luke's account of the Resurrection has something very important for us to attend to. The women approach the tomb worried about a practical problem: "Who will roll away the stone for us?" But God had already removed this obstacle. The messenger tells them: "He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you."

This is the promise for all the baptised: Jesus goes before you. Into your workplace, your family gatherings, your difficult conversations, your moments of doubt – Jesus has gone ahead, preparing the way. Your task is to follow and to proclaim him to others.

Remember Paul's words: "But we believe that having died with Christ we shall return to life with him: Christ, as we know, having been raised from the dead will never die again. Death has no power over him any more ... you too must consider yourselves to be dead to sin but alive for God in Christ Jesus." It may not always feel like as if we are 'alive for God in Christ Jesus' but that is the truth that God provides, and in times of difficulty we patiently wait for Jesus to show us the way.

Baptism for the World

Dear friends, in this Jubilee Year of Hope, our baptism is not just for us – it is for the world. Our society, often cynical and despairing, needs witnesses who live from a different source, whose lives proclaim that death does not have the final word, that transformation is possible, that God still provides.

When those who are to be baptised emerge from these waters tonight, or when we all renew our baptismal promises, remember that the God who has provided creation, freedom, and new hearts now provides us as his witnesses. We become part of God's provision to a world in need – carriers of resurrection hope in everyday places.

As the Paschal candle illuminates the darkness of this church, may our baptismal identity shine forth to illuminate the darkness of our world. For our God is a God who provides – abundantly, faithfully, eternally – and tonight, He provides you and me as light for the world.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!