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Deacon Zane Langenbrunner, second from left, at his Sept. 29, 2022, ordination as a transitio

Deacon Zane Langenbrunner, second from left, at his Sept. 29, 2022, ordination as a transitional deacon in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican. Deacon Langenbrunner, an Indiana native, was selected to chant the Exsultet at the April 8, 2023, Easter Vigil with Pope Francis in St. Peter's Basilica. (OSV News photo/Jennifer Barton, Today's Catholic)

Cindy Wooden

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Easter is the time "to roll away the stone of the tombs in which we often imprison our hope and to look with confidence to the future, for Christ is risen and has changed the direction of history," Pope Francis said as he celebrated the Easter Vigil Mass.

"The power of Easter summons you to roll away every stone of disappointment and mistrust,' the pope said in his homily at the Mass April 8. "The Lord is an expert in rolling back the stones of sin and fear."

The liturgy began in the back of St. Peter's Basilica, rather than in the atrium as usual, with the blessing of the fire and the lighting of the Easter candle.

As the procession further into the darkened basilica and candles were lighted from the Paschal candle, Deacon Zane Langenbrunner chanted, "Lumen Christi" ("the light of Christ") three times. The deacon, a seminarian at the Pontifical North American College, is preparing for ordination to the priesthood for the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Indiana.

Despite the glow of cellphone screens, the basilica became increasingly brighter as the 8,000 people in the congregation lighted their candles as well.

Once Pope Francis in his wheelchair, all the concelebrants, the altar servers and two Swiss Guards were in place, Deacon Langenbrunner chanted the solemn Easter proclamation, the Exsultet.

During the Mass, Pope Francis baptized eight people: three people from Albania, two from the United States -- Auriea Harvey and Francis X. Phi -- and one each from Nigeria, Italy and Venezuela.

Two deacons carried the baptismal font to the pope and held it in front of him during the rite so that he could baptize the men and women without having to walk or stand, something he does with difficulty.

Pope Francis also confirmed the eight adults and gave them their first Communion during the Easter Vigil.

While Pope Francis presided over the two-and-a-half-hour Mass, Cardinal Arthur Roche, prefect of the Dicastery Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, was the main concelebrant at the altar.

In his homily, the pope focused on the Gospel story of the women going to Jesus' tomb, "bewildered and dismayed, their hearts overwhelmed with grief at the death that took away their beloved."

In the life of faith, he said, "sometimes we too may think that the joy of our encounter with Jesus is something belonging to the past, whereas the present consists mostly of sealed tombs: tombs of disappointment, bitterness and distrust" or of thinking "things will never change."

People get weary or feel helpless when confronted with evil, or they see relationships torn apart, injustice or corruption go unchecked, he said. "Then too, we may have come face to face with death, because it robbed us of the presence of our loved ones or because we brushed up against it in illness or a serious setback."

"In these or similar situations, our paths come to a halt before a row of tombs, and we stand there, filled with sorrow and regret, alone and powerless, repeating the question, 'Why?'" the pope said.

But the Gospel says Jesus' women disciples did not stand frozen before the tomb. Rather, he said, they run to the disciples "to proclaim a change of course: Jesus is risen and awaits them in Galilee."

Pope Francis often speaks of the post-Resurrection call to go to Galilee. At the Easter Vigil, he said it is a call to leave the "upper room" where the disciples were hiding in fear and to set out on a mission.

But, he said, it is also a call back to the origins of their relationship with Jesus because they met him in Galilee and began following him there.

The call to go back to Galilee, he said, "asks us to relive that moment, that situation, that experience in which we met the Lord, experienced his love and received a radiantly new way of seeing ourselves, the world around us and the mystery of life itself."

For each person, he said, Galilee "is the 'place' where you came to know Jesus personally, where he stopped being just another personage from a distant past, but a living person: not some distant God but the God who is at your side, who more than anyone else knows you and loves you."

As an Easter exercise, Pope Francis asked people to think back to a time when they experienced the love of Jesus, when they heard God's word speak directly to them or when they felt "the great joy" of forgiveness after going to confession.

"Each of us knows the place of his or her interior resurrection, that beginning and foundation, the place where things changed," the pope said. "We cannot leave this in the past; the Risen Lord invites us to return there to celebrate Easter. Remember your Galilee. Remind yourself."

"Remember the emotions and sensations," he suggested; "see the colors and savor the taste of it."

Rolling away "every stone of disappointment and mistrust," the pope said, "let each of us return to his or her own Galilee, to the place where we first encountered him. Let us rise to new life."