

## HOLY SATURDAY

On Friday evening, Joseph of Arimathea *'took the body and wrapped it in clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.'*



### HOLY SATURDAY

After the horror, devastation, grief and fear of Friday, God's Friday, Saturday is bleak, hollow, desolate. It's a day our church barely recognises, compared to the devotions of the Orthodox churches. Possibly we hardly reflect on Holy Saturday, or Black Saturday as it is also known. We may be preparing the celebratory Easter lunch, or entertaining guests. But this year, in our Covid-19 isolation, we may well share the bleakness, the desolation.

### WHERE IS JESUS?

The Gospels are clear: the body of Jesus has been laid in a rock tomb, a huge stone rolled against the door.

Low in the grave he lay,  
Jesus my Saviour;  
Waiting the coming day,  
Jesus my Lord. *Robert Lowry, Methodist Hymn Book*

So some of us sang. But the Orthodox have a wealth of hymns for this day:

Today a tomb holds him who holds the creation in the hollow of his hand;  
a stone covers him who covered the heavens with glory. ...  
What is this sight we behold? What is this present rest?  
The King of the ages, having through his passion fulfilled the plan of salvation,  
keeps Sabbath in the tomb. *from a hymn for Mattins, Holy Saturday.*

### WHERE ARE THE DISCIPLES AND THE WOMEN?

Mary Magdalen and Mary, the disciples, the Jews are all at home, observing the Sabbath. This is the God-given Day of Rest, a day for prayer and reflection, a day when no work may be done. And for the women, it's a day of waiting: the burial, just before sundown, meant that there was no time for the funeral rites to be carried out. The body of Jesus has not received the women's loving care, the gift of oil and spices. And so they wait...

But there is action at the tomb, as Matthew reports:

*The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, 'Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive. "After three days I will rise again." Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away and tell the people, "He has been raised from the dead," and the last deception would be worse than the first.' Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers: go, make it as secure as you can." So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.*

Matthew 27.62-66

### WHERE IS JESUS?

The Apostle's Creed adds to the Gospel story:

[He] was crucified, died and was buried;	Friday
he descended to the dead.	Saturday
On the third day he rose again.	Sunday

Today's reading from the Letters also tells us:

*For Christ also suffered for sins once and for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which he also went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison.*

1 Peter 3.18-19

### Why is Jesus with the dead?



Another Orthodox hymn sings of Jesus 'trampling down death by death and upon those in the tombs bestowing life'. The icon known as the Icon of the Resurrection to the Orthodox and as The Harrowing of Hell to the West (previous page) shows Jesus with the dead - all the righteous who have died since the beginning of the world. Jesus has broken the gates of hell: he is standing on them, now in the shape of a cross. In the shadows below them is a dark figure - death or the devil - who has been defeated. Jesus is holding two people by their wrists, Eve in his left hand and Adam in his right. The three men on our left are Old Testament faithful ones, Abraham and Moses, with John the Baptist, the first NT martyr, closest to Jesus. On our right are Abel, the first OT martyr, David, and Solomon. Why are Adam and Eve being brought from their tombs? Their salvation shows the absolute power of Christ to save. Interestingly, Matthew refers to the raising of many righteous ones who were asleep in Matthew 27. 50-54 - but on Friday, not Saturday, and accompanied by an earthquake.

#### **HOLY SATURDAY GREAT SATURDAY** (Orthodox Churches)

We have explored Holy Saturday in Scripture, in story and in image. We know where Jesus is, know the tomb has an armed guard, and that the women and disciples are at home, reflecting, waiting, through the Sabbath.

#### **Where are we on Holy Saturday?**

Like the witnesses of the Crucifixion, we may be exhausted, grief-filled, afraid. We may be disturbed at having to move from our Friday grief to Resurrection celebrations after only one day to mourn. Or to the next verse, in three of the Gospels. Holy Saturday is one day in the year. In the silence and stillness, we wonder and wait. We want to move from grief to joy. But Holy Saturday 2020 is already linked with Coronavirus: our 'valley of the shadow' is the valley of Covid-19. One writer has said that the pandemic is our Holy Week.

One day to grieve? Our life isn't like that, is it? Our grief lasts much more than a day - weeks, months, even years.

'Everyone who has ever lived, who will ever live, will someday undergo a Holy Saturday of our own. Someday we will all know the power of overwhelming loss when life as we know it changes, when all hope dies in midflight. Then, and only then, can we begin to know the purpose of Holy Saturday. The importance of Holy Saturday lies in its power to bring us to the kind of faith the spiritual masters call "mature". Holy Saturday faith is not about counting our blessings; it is about dealing with darkness and growing hope. Without the Holy Saturdays of life, none of us may ever really grow up spiritually.'

*Joan Chittister osb, Benedictine nun, writer*

'If you are willing to rest in the Sabbath, ... then you may come as close to the Christ as you will ever get - there in that quiet care where you wait to see how the Maker of All Life will choose to come to you in the dark.'

*Rev Prof Barbara Brown Taylor, Huffington Post 2014*

#### **We pray**

In you, O Lord, have I taken refuge;  
let me never be put to shame;  
**deliver me in your righteousness.**

Incline your ear to me;  
**make haste to deliver me.**

Be my strong rock, a castle to keep me safe,  
for you are my crag and stronghold;

**for the sake of your name, lead me and guide me.**

Take me out of the net that they have secretly set for me,

**for you are my tower of strength. ...**

My times are in your hand;

**rescue me from the hand of my enemies  
and from those who persecute me.**

Make your face to shine upon your servant,

**and in your lovingkindness save me.** *Psalm 31. 1-4, 15-16 UIW*

#### **We pray**

wherever your image is still disfigured  
by poverty, sickness, selfishness, war and greed,  
wherever your people live in fear of Covid-19,  
wherever your earth is ravaged by fire or climate change,  
may the new creation in Jesus Christ appear  
in justice, love and peace. Amen

*Unknown, alt Joan*

Christ our God,  
your love is poured out in death for our sakes.

Hold us in your embrace  
as we wait for Easter dawn.

Comfort us with the promise  
that no power on earth, not even death itself,  
can separate us from your love;

and strengthen us to wait  
until you are revealed to us  
in all your risen glory. Amen

*Vanderbilt Library Resources*

*Icons: Entombment (Greek, modern) Resurrection (Russian)*