

Holy Saturday is a strange day—an empty day. It echoes those days following a loss or bereavement when there is a sense of denial of what has happened—a numbness—a feeling that the world is going on around us but has nothing to do with us. This was certainly how Jesus' family and friends were feeling on this day, 2000 years ago. After such promise—and such hope—nothingness and emptiness.

And yet, the reading from the ancient homily suggests something is going on—something incredibly powerful but completely hidden from the eyes of those still living.

It speaks of the very early tradition about the very first thing the dead Jesus did. It tells that he went into the shadowland to find the countless thousands who had died before he came into the world—whose way to heaven was blocked until he himself broke down the gates and opened the way to eternal life.

He travelled back through generations—hundreds of them—until he came to Adam and Eve. He does not blame them for all that has happened to humanity—or to him. He reaches out a hand and calls them into the new life he has won for them.

As in our losses and bereavements—in our dry times of prayer—more is often happening at deeper levels than we can yet feel...As the Lord reaches into the depths of our being—heals us—makes us whole—and sets us free...

And, in time, we come to know it...

Reflective Prayer— Read slowly and ponder...

Lord Jesus,
there was no place in anywhere that was created
that you could not go.

Your dying took you into the shadowlands of death
to find those who had died before you—
who could not access heaven
until your death opened up the way of life for them.

Reach into the shadowlands of our lives
and call us forth—
beloved children of God—
to live lives filled with the promise
of all that is to come...

And make our lives witness to that for others
so that, through us,
you reach out into their shadows and darkness
and give to them your gifts of love and mercy.

Lent 2019 Year C

HOLY SATURDAY

God's Gifts of Love and Mercy: Waiting...



God's Gift of Love and Mercy: Holy Saturday

A reading from an ancient homily for Holy Saturday
"What is happening? Today there is a great silence over the earth, a great silence, and stillness, a great silence because the King sleeps; the earth was in terror and was still, because God slept in the flesh and raised up those who were sleeping from the ages. God has died in the flesh, and the underworld has trembled.

Truly he goes to seek out our first parent like a lost sheep; he wishes to visit those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. He goes to free the prisoner Adam and his fellow-prisoner Eve from their pains, he who is God, and Adam's son.

The Lord goes in to them holding his victorious weapon, his cross. When Adam, the first created man, sees him, he strikes his breast in terror and calls out to all: 'My Lord be with you all.' And Christ in reply says to Adam: 'And with your spirit.' And grasping his hand he raises him up, saying: 'Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light.

'I am your God, who for your sake became your son, who for you and your descendants now speak and command with authority those in prison: Come forth, and those in darkness: Have light, and those who sleep: Rise.

'I command you: Awake, sleeper, I have not made you to be held a prisoner in the underworld. Arise from the dead; I am the life of the dead. Arise, O man, work of my hands, arise, you who were fashioned in my image.

Rise, let us go hence; for you in me and I in you, together we are one undivided person.

'For you, I your God became your son; for you, I the Master took on your form; that of slave; for you, I who am above the heavens came on earth and under the earth; for you, man, I became as a man without help, free among the dead; for you, who left a garden, I was handed over to Jews from a garden and crucified in a garden.



Harrowing of Hell. Fresco, by Fra Angelico, c. 1430s

'Look at the spittle on my face, which I received because of you, in order to restore you to that first divine inbreathing at creation. See the blows on my cheeks, which I accepted in order to refashion your distorted form to my own image.

'See the scourging of my back, which I accepted in order to disperse the load of your sins which was laid upon your back. See my hands nailed to the tree for a good purpose, for you, who stretched out your hand to the tree for an evil one.

'I slept on the cross and a sword pierced my side, for you, who slept in paradise and brought forth Eve from your side. My side healed the pain of your side; my sleep will release you from your sleep in Hades; my sword has checked the sword which was turned against you.

'But arise, let us go hence. The enemy brought you out of the land of paradise; I will reinstate you, no longer in paradise, but on the throne of heaven. I denied you the tree of life, which was a figure, but now I myself am united to you, I who am life. I posted the cherubim to guard you as they would slaves; now I make the cherubim worship you as they would God.

"The cherubim throne has been prepared, the bearers are ready and waiting, the bridal chamber is in order, the food is provided, the everlasting houses and rooms are in readiness; the treasures of good things have been opened; the kingdom of heaven has been prepared before the ages."