

Holy Saturday: April 11, 2020

We are in the middle of the great Tridium, the Three Days, which is the period of three days that begins with the liturgy on the evening of Maundy Thursday, reaches its high point in the Easter Vigil, and closes with evening prayer on Easter Sunday. They are days that we gather to worship, give thanks, and remember the holy week of Christ's redeeming work. We know the meaning of Maundy Thursday, the night of foot washing, when our Savior instituted the Last Supper and mandated that we "love one another". We know the meaning of Good Friday, the day when we remember that Jesus died on the cross for our sins. We also know the meaning of Easter Sunday, when we remember that he rose from the dead in triumphed over death thereby saving us to live eternally with the Father in Heaven. But what about Holy Saturday? It can seem like it's just stuck there in the middle. It traditionally has been a day of prayer and meditation. But what does this day commemorate? --On Holy Saturday, Christians remember that while his dead body was lying in a tomb, Jesus' soul "descended into the dead," as the Apostle's Creed says in the second article. It's traditionally known as the "harrowing of hell," when Jesus announced salvation to all the righteous who had died before his coming.

Today I encourage you to pray and meditate, remembering all that Jesus wrought for you in this Holy Week and all that God is doing for you now and in the future. I ask that you pray for this present time that we are experiencing.

Pray for the victims of Covid19, and those who heroically care for them. Especially pray for the medical people who are members of our church and their families as they sacrifice greatly for all of us. Pray for our leadership in the world, our country, our state, our city and our church. Pray for each person who is abiding by the "stay at home" order, for those in total isolation, living alone, for those who are in households with children, those who work from home, those who are essential and braving interaction with others, and pray for those who are laid off, or have completely lost their business or work. I ask you to pray for our church, the repair work of the building, our campaign, our staff who is still working from home and also going in as necessary. Pray for all of our volunteers who are continuing to serve in so many different ways. Pray for the future: for our economy, for our continued health, for our continued emotional and spiritual well-being.

Meditate on what God has done for us and you personally. Take time to worship and reflect on all the details of the first holy week. Take time to talk God for all that he is doing now. Have gratitude for all the work that God is affecting for the future. There is an ancient sermon that I found that I am adding to the bottom of this letter. Please take time to read and reflect on its words and how they apply to you now. The author is unknown and comes from the readings of the Divine Office of the early church.

The full text of the “ancient homily for Holy Saturday”:

“Something strange is happening – there is a great silence on earth today, a great silence and stillness. The whole earth keeps silence because the King is asleep. The earth trembled and is still because God has fallen asleep in the flesh and he has raised up all who have slept ever since the world began. God has died in the flesh and hell trembles with fear.

He has gone to search for our first parent, as for a lost sheep. Greatly desiring to visit those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death, he has gone to free from sorrow the captives Adam and Eve, he who is both God and the son of Eve. The Lord approached them bearing the cross, the weapon that had won him the victory. At the sight of him, Adam, the first man he had created, struck his breast in terror and cried out to everyone: “My Lord be with you all.” Christ answered him: “And with your spirit.” He took him by the hand and raised him up, saying:

“Awake, O sleeper, and rise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.

“I am your God, who for your sake have become your son. Out of love for you and for your descendants I now by my own authority command all who are held in bondage to come forth, all who are in darkness to be enlightened, all who are sleeping to arise.

“I order you, O sleeper, to awake. I did not create you to be held a prisoner in hell. Rise from the dead, for I am the life of the dead. Rise up, work of my hands, you who were created in my image. Rise, let us leave this place, for you are in me and I am in you; together we form only one person and we cannot be separated. For your sake I, your God, became your son; I, the Lord, took the form of a slave; I, whose home is above the heavens, descended to the earth and beneath the earth.

“For your sake, for the sake of man, I became like a man without help, free among the dead. For the sake of you, who left a garden, I was betrayed to the Jews in a garden, and I was crucified in a garden.

“See on my face the spittle I received in order to restore to you the life I once breathed into you. See there the marks of the blows I received in order to refashion your warped nature in my image. On my back see the marks of the scourging I endured to remove the burden of sin that weighs upon your back. See my hands, nailed firmly to a tree, for you who once wickedly stretched out your hand to a tree.

“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 has healed the pain in yours. My sleep will rouse you from your sleep in hell. The sword that pierced me has sheathed the sword that was turned against you.

“Rise, let us leave this place. The enemy led you out of the earthly paradise. I will not restore you to that paradise, but I will enthrone you in heaven. I forbade you the tree that was only a symbol of life, but see, I who am life itself am now one with you. I appointed cherubim to guard you as slaves are guarded, but now I make them worship you as God.

“The throne formed by cherubim awaits you, its bearers swift and eager. The bridal chamber is adorned, the banquet is ready, the eternal dwelling places are prepared, the treasure houses of all good things lie open. The kingdom of heaven has been prepared for you from all eternity.”

Praise be to Our Lord Jesus Christ!”

God be with you in this special time in our history, this special time in our church year. God be with you as you “stay at home” and all the challenges and opportunities you face. God be with you as you spend time with family and friends either at home or through our personal media of phone and computers. God be with you as you gather in your heart and soul with Him and your community of faith. We are together even in our physical distancing; God is still with us...thank Him that He doesn't practice any distancing from us. We are the church together, we are Memorial together. We are the bridge from this place to our Father in heaven.

Let us pray, Great and almighty God, we come together in this moment to thank you for all that you have done, do and continue to plan for us. We come together to confess our sins, and to be forgiven because of Christ's work on the cross. We come together as baptized members of your family, as the body of Christ on earth. We ask you to protect us, bless us, and continue to use us to bring about your kingdom, to be the bridge from our world into the next. Thank you for your great sacrifice and overwhelming love that you have for your whole creation. May our time in worship and service bring you glory, and show the world how our lives are meaningful and fulfilled because of you. We pray that you hold us and infuse your power into us to renew us and uphold us to share your love with others. In your holy, glorious, and everlasting name we pray. Amen.

Bless you and keep you this week! Pastor Mary