

Holy Saturday Reflection

- Did you know there is no Mass on Holy Saturday? The evening Mass on Saturday is the Easter Vigil for Easter Sunday. After the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday the very next Mass is the Easter Vigil. So what happens on Holy Saturday?
- Holy Saturday is a day to be spent in quiet, solemn reflection on the suffering and death of our Savior. It is also a day to spend in anticipation of our Lord's resurrection.
- The Church does have a prayer service called "**Tenebrae**" which is normally held on Holy Saturday morning. **Tenebrae** (Latin for 'shadows' or 'darkness') is a service during which there is a gradual extinguishing of candles while a series of readings and psalms are chanted or recited. All is sad and mournful, as though it were a funeral service; nothing could more emphatically express the grief that now weighs down the heart of our holy Mother, the Church. The purpose of this service is to recreate the betrayal, abandonment, and agony of Jesus' passion, and it is left unfinished, because the story isn't over until Easter Day.
- While we cannot physically join together in our Churches this year, we can spiritually join together from our homes to pray a shortened version of Tenebrae. I could think of no better reflection to send you today than to send you one of the beautiful psalms prayed and one of the most beautiful non-scriptural readings that is read during Tenebrae on Holy Saturday. Both the Psalm and the reading appear below.
- The reading below is one of my favorites. It speaks of what happens between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. It is beautiful, powerful and captures the essence of what Jesus passion, death and resurrection means for all of us. I hope

you agree. Pray the Psalm first then spend time with the reading.

Psalm 51 (A Lamentation Prayer for Forgiveness)

Have mercy on me, God, in accord with your merciful love; in your abundant compassion blot out my transgressions.

Thoroughly wash away my guilt; and from my sin cleanse me.

For I know my transgressions; my sin is always before me

Against you, you alone have I sinned; I have done what is evil in your eyes. So that you are just in your word, and without reproach in your judgment

Behold, I was born in guilt, in sin my mother conceived me. Behold, you desire true sincerity; and secretly you teach me wisdom.

Cleanse me with hyssop, that I may be pure; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

You will let me hear gladness and joy; the bones you have crushed will rejoice. Turn away your face from my sins; blot out all my iniquities.

A clean heart create for me, God; renew within me a steadfast spirit ,

Do not drive me from before your face, nor take from me your holy spirit

Restore to me the gladness of your salvation; uphold me with a willing spirit.

I will teach the wicked your ways, that sinners may return to you.

Rescue me from violent bloodshed, God, my saving God, and my tongue will sing joyfully of your justice

Lord, you will open my lips; and my mouth will
proclaim your praise.
For you do not desire sacrifice* or I would give it;
a burnt offering you would not accept.
My sacrifice, O God, is a contrite spirit; a contrite,
humbled heart, O God, you will not scorn.

Treat Zion kindly according to your good will;
build up the walls of Jerusalem.
Then you will desire the sacrifices of the just, burnt
offering and whole offerings; then they will offer up
young bulls on your altar. Amen.

A reading from an ancient homily for Holy Saturday

The Lord descends into hell.

Something strange is happening – there is 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 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 created man, stuck his breast in terror and cried out to everyone: 'My Lord be with you all.' And Christ in reply says

to Adam: 'And with your spirit.' He took him by the hand and raised 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 have become your son. Out of love for you and 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 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 came to earth and beneath 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 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.

'See the marks of the scourging on my back, which I accepted in order 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 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 has healed the pain in your side; my sleep will arise

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 denied 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 the cherubim worship you as they would God.

"The throne formed by cherubim awaits you, its bearers are ready and waiting, the bridal chamber is adorned, the banquet is ready, the eternal dwelling places are prepared; the treasures of all good things lie open. The kingdom of heaven has been prepared for you from all eternity."

- What a powerful reading. So let's close this Holy Saturday reflection with a prayer:
- "Almighty, ever-living God, whose Only-begotten Son descended to the realm of the dead, and rose from there to glory, grant that your faithful people, who were buried with him in baptism, may, by his resurrection, obtain eternal life.

We make our prayer Through Christ our Lord. Amen