

A BLESSED EASTER

In the stillness of the morning on Holy Saturday there is a flurry of activity at the parish as the Church and Chapel are being prepared for the Easter Vigil Celebrations tonight and Easter Day. Tonight, along with the lighting of the Easter Fire, the Exhultet and the readings of our salvation history which concludes with the Gospel proclamation of the Resurrection of Jesus within the Eucharist, we will celebrate the baptism of several persons who have been preparing for this day throughout the year in the RCIA. Others, previously baptized in other Christian communities, will be received into full communion with the Church through a profession of faith, and still others will complete their initiation in the Catholic faith through the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist.

This is a wonderful event for them and for the entire Church as we enter into the saving presence of Jesus Christ who comes to each of us, calls you and me by name, as he did to Mary at the empty tomb, and invites us to share his life daily in our faith journey.

But what about Holy Saturday? Is it just a day of waiting, a time to color eggs and help the Easter Bunny prepare the baskets? Absolutely not!! It is so much more. I found a very reflective article written by Randy Sly. I am sharing it with you to help us all have a better perspective of the power of this Holy Day.

"As a child I learned to stand still after a lightning flash and count to myself until I heard the thunder. That would tell me how far away the storm was located. I had no idea when the sound would come. I just waited and counted.

Over the years I have often used this interval to describe the pause that takes place just before an actual shift in thinking or action takes place. Throughout history this natural phenomenon is reflected in a lightning flash of insight that is soon followed by the sounds of responding action.

Such is Holy Saturday - when we stand in the silence and count the hours until the New Fire of the Service of Light during the Easter Vigil is kindled. It is the only day of the entire year when no Mass is celebrated by the Church.

In the drama of Holy Week, it is the day when creation holds its breath, awaiting the resurrection.

So what should we make of this time - this interval? Should we just go about our business as usual, then pick up our observation at sunset?

On this side of the empty tomb we already know that Easter will come, as it already has. We are fully aware that the tomb was empty and the account that will be read on the Lord's Day will not change.

On that side, the tomb is occupied and they did not know what to expect. Perhaps only his mother Mary, gazing at a few stains of blood still on her hands, knew that it couldn't be the end.

So, on this day of silence, as we remember Christ in the tomb, we also remember that while it was silent on earth, the spirit world was quite active. Today is the Day of Descent, the "Harrowing of Hell." It was here He again was able to cry out those words, "It is finished!"

"He descended into hell." The Catholic Catechism quotes from an ancient Holy Saturday homily when addressing the creedal statement that has been apart of Christian faith since the very beginning.

That Homily, by an anonymous priest, contains these profound words:

'Today a great silence reigns on earth, a great silence and a great stillness. A great 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. . . He has gone to search for Adam, our first father, 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 Adam in his bonds and Eve, captive with him - He who is both their God and the son of Eve. . . "I am your God, who for your sake have become your son. . . I order you, O sleeper, to awake. I did not create you to be a prisoner in hell. Rise from the dead, for I am the life of the dead." [Catechism, Profession of Faith, 635]

Silence and stillness reigns today. We can reflect on Christ's descent to the abode of the dead, there declaring that the final death has been conquered once-and-for-all. He preached hope to the hopeless and life those who had none.

Holy Saturday is a day to pray for those who walk among us as the living dead (those for whom Easter is just another day). Their hope is placed in all things other than Christ and, for them, death will be ultimate, final, and hopeless.

Yet, they are living in the interval. The thunder has not sounded, signaling the end. Christ is there for them, declaring the same hope he did on the first Holy Saturday.

Let us pray for our family members, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and even those who are known to God but merely cross our path."

In the name of Fr. Peter and all the pastoral and administrative staff of Holy Family I wish you a very blessed Easter.

May the blessing and peace of the Risen Jesus fill you with light, happiness and peace which surpasses all earthly understanding. May you transcend the mundane of this world and encounter the joy of Christ within and your home. May you bring that life to our city, our state and nation.

Easter Blessings
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