



Into the Depths

A Powerful Silence

“**T**oday 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.” These lines, from an ancient homily on Holy Saturday, have been a fruitful source of meditation for me.

The stillness of Holy Saturday after the gruesome activity of Good Friday is a powerful moment of prayer. Our Lord has been betrayed, dragged through the streets, killed alongside common criminals, and abandoned by His closest followers, and now it appears as if nothing is happening. The drama is over. God became man to wage war on sin and has been defeated. The abandonment, fear, and disappointment the apostles experienced the day after the King of Kings and Lord of Lords died must have been profound. The apostles fled because they could not understand how Jesus' apparent defeat was, in fact, His greatest victory.

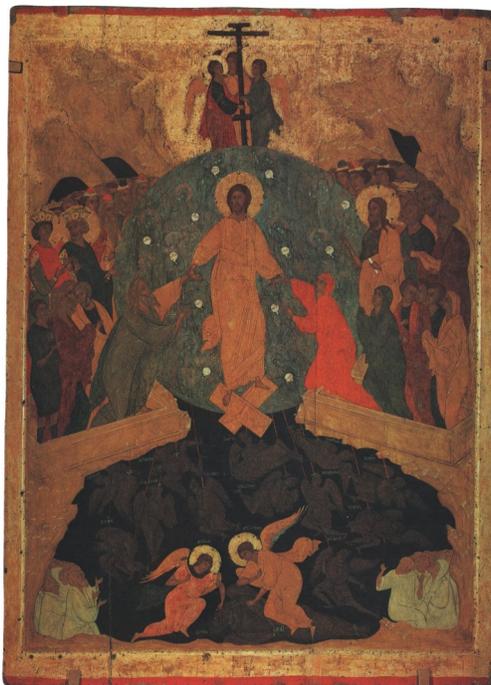
Of course, as twenty-first century Christians, we have the benefit of knowing the full story. Jesus actually conquered death through the sacrifice of His life. The silence of Holy Saturday is not inactivity. Rather, our

Lord is powerfully active in a mystical way as He descends into Hell. In fact, the moment when the apostles felt most abandoned was the moment when Jesus was acting most vigorously on their behalf. Even though they deserted Jesus, He remained faithful to the promises He gave while walking the earth. We can easily wonder how the apostles could be so blind. These were the men who had been with Jesus and witnessed the many miracles He performed. Time and time again, Jesus reveals in the gospels that God's ways are not man's ways, but the apostles close themselves off to the possibility that God is still in control even in the scandalous event of the Cross.

However, we should not be too quick to judge. We have our own Holy Saturday moments in our lives. When we are confronted with the Cross, all too often our first reaction is to dismay. After all, the

Cross hurts. Whether it's worries about the future, losing a job, an illness, or a relationship gone sour, the problems in our lives are unpleasant; they hurt. Our suffering can overwhelm us, especially if our encounter with the Cross is unexpected.

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Growing Hope

An early Easter is always a test of hope. Is it *really* going to warm up? Will our farmers have decent weather for planting and for growing the fragile little sprouts of corn and beans?

Our spiritual lives are constantly being tested by hope, as well. When we struggle to conquer a sin, when our prayer lives seem dry and distracted, or our commitment to our vocations is tested. But, as Ryan Mattingly notes in the cover article, there is a silent, powerful grace at work during these trying moments. We simply need to shield the little sprouts of our faith

by practicing the presence of God and custody of our senses. We need to continually make acts of faith and hope so that these sprouts of faith can stretch and grow. In that way, we are transformed into that supernatural organism made possible through Christ's resurrection and our baptism.

This is also true on a bigger scale. There are many little seeds of hope planted in the young people of our diocese through the good

work of families, parishes, and schools. But it is your continual prayers and persistent sacrifices—in season and out of season—that make these seeds sprout into vocations to the priesthood and religious life. We must never abandon prayer and sacrifice for vocations. The Lord promised us that it *will* bear fruit. “The one thing the Lord tells us to do regarding vocations is to

“Ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his Harvest” (Mat 9:38). Let's take him at his Word, and trust that he will make the seed grow (cf 1 Cor 3:6) into an abundant harvest of vocations!



Lectio Divina Step by Step by Dan Burke

Preparation: First, we should arrange a place to pray that is restful and devoid of any distractions or things that might distract us (i.e. computers, TV, etc.). This may involve lighting candles, burning incense or creating whatever atmosphere fosters calm and peace. The presence of icons and other visual aids to meditation can be of great benefit here as well. It is best if the place chosen for Lectio Divina (or any kind of prayer) is a comfortable area set aside just for this activity.

Once our environment is properly prepared, we should then assume a bodily posture that is conducive to prayer and reading. As we consider our posture, we should do so with the recognition that we are entering into the presence of God. Our posture should reflect one that would be the same as if we were with Christ in the flesh or before him in Eucharistic adoration. Again, simplicity is important. We need not over-emphasize posture.

We then turn our hearts to God, begin to breathe slowly and deeply, focusing on simple attentiveness to the Lord until we are relaxed and able to focus our attention on scripture. If our minds wander, we should avoid any frustration or self-condemnation and gently bring our attention back to our Lord and the text, breathing in and out in a purposeful and relaxed manner. It is important to note that unlike in non-Christian forms of Eastern prayer which seek to empty the mind, Christian prayer seeks to fill our minds with

an attentiveness to God. This gentle but purposeful effort will yield a constant aiming and re-aiming of our hearts and minds toward Him and His Word.

Once we are as calm and peaceful as is possible, we simply acknowledge that Christ is with us and we pray in this or some similar way: “Lord, I know you are with me. Thank you for allowing me to recognize your presence. Thank you for being here with me now.”

Then, we might offer a prayer to the Holy Spirit.

Lectio – *An attentive slow repetitious recitation of a short passage of scripture.* It is always advisable to meditate on the scripture from the mass of the day, particularly the Gospel passage. However, any text of scripture will do. The key is not to rush. The goal is not to finish any particular portion of scripture but to purposefully delve into the depths of any passage that will lift our hearts to God. Just before we begin reading, we trace the sign of the cross on the scriptures, kiss the cross we traced, and then begin to read very slowly, vocally, and gently, coming to an understanding of the words themselves along with the related ideas and images that surface. When a particular passage or word strikes us, we pause to consider it more fully. At the first pause, we will then naturally move into meditatio. If you don't seem to progress in this way, simply stay at each phase until you do. Don't worry if you don't progress. The goal is not to fulfill the method, but to honor and seek God.

Meditatio – *An effort to understand the passage and apply it to my own life.* **Continued on next page...**

Corporal Works of Mercy: Taking Action with Our Faith

Feed the hungry/Give drink to the thirsty: Work at a soup kitchen or donate to a food pantry

Clothe the naked: Purge your closet and donate to a thrift store

Shelter the Homeless: Donate to a homeless shelter or crisis pregnancy center, or consider foster care or adoption

Visit the sick: Go to the hospital or a nursing home

Ransom the captive: Donate to Syrian refugees (e.g. through Caritas International or the Knights of Columbus)

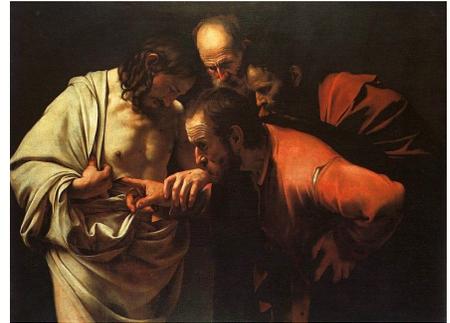
Bury the dead: Go to someone's funeral or create a memorial for the unborn children lost to abortion

Passage to Pray With:

THE RESURRECTION APPEARANCE

On the evening of that first day of the week when the doors were locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. [Jesus] said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained."

~John 20:19-23



Lectio cont'd.

Now we meditate on what we have read, visualizing it and listening for His prompting or His guiding. We seek the deeper spiritual meanings of the words as we place ourselves in a gospel scene as one of the participants or simply hear God speaking directly to us as we read the words. We don't strain or exert extreme effort here, we simply allow the words to penetrate our hearts and minds and follow where God leads us through the text. Sometimes it is helpful to slowly repeat the passage or word over and over again until the captivation and conversation with God on the passage subsides. It can also be helpful to read each word and to briefly pause before we read the next. As we do this, we allow for silence and careful listening. We break the normal frantic pace and cycle of life to be attentive to the Beloved. As we begin to respond or converse with God about our encounter with Him, we then move into oratio.

Oratio – *Engaging or talking with God about the passage* As we are drawn into the passage we begin to converse with God about what we are reading. Oratio is simply the response of the heart to God. It is important here to remember that God has revealed Himself as a person. When we talk with Him, it is sometimes helpful to Call this to mind. Our conversation should be as natural as with someone whom we deeply love and desire to know. In whatever manner we are led, we ask for forgiveness, we thank Him, we praise Him, we ask Him for the grace to be changed by what we have read. We ask Him to help us more fully realize what He wants us to be and to help us apply His moral, spiritual, or practical guidance to our lives. As we engage with Him, He may choose to call us deeper, to become lost in this heavenly dialogue with Him. For those who tend to be very talkative in life and prayer, it might be important here to slow down our own words and to be attentive to Him rather than to what we desire to say. We will eventually find ourselves moving into contemplatio.

Contemplatio – *Allowing oneself to become absorbed in the words of God and the presence of God as he calls us into deeper prayer.* Here God satisfies our ultimate thirst and needs as the Holy Spirit prays with us, in us, and through us. Sometimes we recognize this work in our hearts; sometimes it is merely a matter of faith that He is with us and imparting His life-changing grace to us. Always we can know that He is changing us because he has promised that the "word of God never returns void" and that as St. Paul says, "faith comes from hearing the word of God." It is important here to note that this phase of prayer is not always sensual. In fact, for those who are more advanced in the interior life, it may be a time of dryness and a dark silence. Regardless, we know by faith that he is true to His word. If we seek Him, we will find Him, even if He is found in ways that are difficult, or very different than we had anticipated.

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Quote of the Month

"It is Jesus that you seek when you dream of happiness; He is waiting for you when nothing else you find satisfies you; He is the beauty to which you are so attracted; it is He who provoked you with that thirst for fullness that will not let you settle for compromise; it is He who urges you to shed the masks of a false life; it is He who reads in your heart your most genuine choices, the choices that others try to stifle.

It is Jesus who stirs in you the desire to do something great with your lives, the will to follow an ideal, the refusal to allow yourselves to be ground down by mediocrity, the courage to commit yourselves humbly and patiently to improving yourselves and society, making the world more human and more fraternal." ~ John Paul II World Youth Day 2000

THE LIFE OF PRAYER:

The Resurrection tells us that our faith is not in vain, that our hope is not founded on a dead man, but on a living one, the Living One par excellence, whose life is so strong that it vivifies, in time as in eternity, all those who believe in Him. "I am the Resurrection and the Life; he that believeth in Me, although he be dead, shall live" (Jn 11:25). Joy in truth: for only sincere and upright souls who seek the truth lovingly and, still more, "do the truth" can fully rejoice in the Resurrection. We are sincere when we recognize ourselves for what we are, with all our faults, deficiencies, and need for conversion. From this knowledge of our miseries springs the sincere resolve to purify ourselves of the old leaven of the passions in order to be renewed completely in the risen Christ. O most kind Lord...raise me up to You, so that I may run without slackening, while You call and guide me. My soul thirsts; draw me to the divine spring of eternal satiety; lift me out of the abyss toward this living spring, so that I may drink as much as I can of it, and live on it forever, O my God, my Life.

~From *Divine Intimacy*

Just like the apostles, we can forget our experiences of God's power and love and give in to a sense of abandonment. But Jesus never abandons us! We must remember that at all times in our lives, God is acting powerfully for both our good and the good of the entire world, no matter how things may appear to us.

That's the beauty of Holy Saturday. Jesus came to bring salvation to the world and to draw us into His love, but He chose to do so in a mysterious, hidden way. God could have saved man in a less shocking way, but the Cross shows how much God is willing to endure for our sake. When we are presented with our moments of suffering, we are presented with a choice.

We can make an act of trust in Jesus and show Him how much we are willing to endure for His sake, or we can flee. "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24).



~Ryan Mattingly Seminarian for the Diocese of Peoria

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