



Wall mosaic of entombment of Jesus. Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus.

He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away.

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate

and said, "Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.'

Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He has been raised from the dead,' and the last deception would be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can. "So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone. (Matthew 27:57-66)

A reflection for Holy Saturday

In this year that seems so different from all the others we have known, time seems to have slowed down – Chronos time that is - and with little traffic on the road and movement curtailed, the world seems a quieter and more reflective place.

Today – Holy Saturday is for Christians the quietest day of the year: one when we wait, pray and yes, anticipate what is to come, for though we may be in deep sorrow for what has been, we know that there is so much more to look forward to.

But for Jesus's disciples, the events of the previous few days had led them down a blind alley where all their hopes and expectations had been dashed to nothing.

In the gospel reading for today we meet Joseph of Arimathea .

Joseph was a rich and powerful man – a member of the Sanhedrin or council of Jews and as such he might have had some collective part to play in the persecution and trial of Jesus and yet Matthew tells us that he was a secret disciple of Jesus. Having paid deference to his superiors during Christ's life, he must have watched the crucifixion and could no longer remain silent as

sunset and the Sabbath drew near. He met Pilate and asked for Jesus' body so that he could bury him in his own tomb, before the sun set.

In that one courageous act when all around him were melting into the shadows and denying any knowledge of Jesus as a master and friend, Joseph received the fullness of God's blessing upon him and like the thief on the cross was assured his place in heaven.

The Pharisees were still highly charged in their persecution of the troublesome rabbi and fearful that Jesus's body might be removed to fulfil his own prophecy (that he would be raised from the dead in three days), demanded that the tomb be sealed.

Two women – Mary Magdalene and another Mary sat at a distance and watched this happening.

For them and the other disciples the Word had gone – nothing more to say, nothing more to be done until the Sabbath was over so that they could anoint Jesus's body with spices in accordance with the custom of the day. And so they waited.

And then there was silence.

In church today there would normally be no services, no liturgies. However, a small group of people would be quietly making preparations for the glorious celebration of the Resurrection – arranging flowers, replacing ornaments and furnishings, laying out service books.

This year however is different – no one will be in church at all and God has given us this time (his Kairos time?) to experience the silence – to feel something of the desolation felt by those who had lived and worked and travelled alongside Jesus.

How does it feel to have lost our dearest friend and master, to remember the times spent in fellowship and learning?

How does it feel not to know the future and Jesus's promises of his father's heavenly Kingdom now that He is no longer with us?

Our senses are heightened this year: we hear more acutely in the quiet world; we see more clearly when we take exercise in the green spaces.

All around us spring is gathering apace and we watch creation bursting with life and yet, for this one day death and loss is our watchword. We are at a loss to know what to do except wait as the One who is our life descends far away from us into the realm of nothingness.

We are alone in our solitude and there is no object outside us on which we may fasten: in the words of Pope Benedict II 'Nothing to observe, nothing happening, nothing to do. Our usual, finite, comparative, means-to-end activity is suspended. We are in the presence of the Infinite; we are in fact *in* the Infinite.'

And yet even in this time of nothingness Christ is working a miracle – the greatest of all miracles. He has descended into the unreachable depth of our solitude and has hallowed it with his love so that we may never ever be alone again.

For there will come a time when we will make our own descent into that night which no word penetrates – a journey we make without our human family, a journey made in solitude.

But because of this Holy Day there will be a voice that calls to us, a hand that takes our own hand and leads us on.

Hell was beaten from the moment Love entered the region of death and we shall no longer fear it, for we know now that we shall never ever be alone.

So today let us be still, let us be quiet for a little while; and as we live through worry and uncertainty may we know that Christ's everlasting love for us will never be broken.

“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”
Rev 21.4