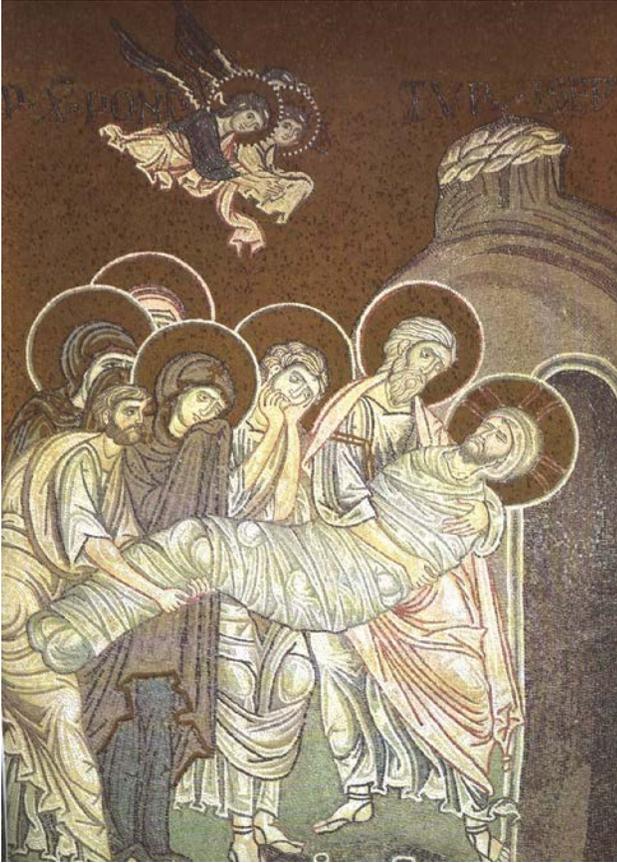


# Holy Saturday

## Sabbato Sancto in Dominica sepultura



## Baptized into Christ's death

When we were baptized, we were baptized into Christ's death. It is such a strange idea to the modern mind. Surely, our modern sensibilities suspect something very strange in this idea, something primitive, even something morbid. Yet that is what happened to us. St. Paul tells us so himself: *'Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we were buried with Him in baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we should walk in newness of life.'* (Rom.6:3-4)

What a paradox we find here: the modern mind, the worldly, secular mind; the very mind which demands ready abortion for the unwanted; easy death for those no longer valued; perfect embryos, disposing of the surplus, that very mind, terrified of and wanting to deny that we die, hides behind its own artificial forms of life until our

very humanity is abolished. Devilish work indeed! Such a mind, fixed upon hedonism, comfort and the pursuit of self-gratification wants nothing to do, indeed, wants to know nothing about sacrifice and dying and self-mortification.

But if we who are in Christ know anything at all, it is this: that we have entered into his death. Yes, we shall all die, if we are talking of that biological event, that breakdown of our physical form. But of death itself? What of the real death beyond the separation of the soul from the body? Where is our fear? For we have died already. Mystically, spiritually, that is to say, in reality, we have already died. Our bodies went down into the water but our souls went down with Christ into Hades. That mystery, that pearl of great price is now buried within our hearts – no wonder we want that for our children as well as ourselves. But what is the point of the blessed Apostle's assertion that we were baptized into a death? *'So we should walk in newness of life.'* That is the point; that is our struggle. That has been the very point of this Holy Week, that we become now and forever what we became at our baptism: new people!

Without this day, the Great Sabbath, the day Christ both rested in the tomb in his body whilst his soul was in Hades, proclaiming the gospel to the dead – without this day there is no such thing as baptism. The whole point of this day is that Christ has fulfilled the old Mosaic Passover. He has gone through not the Red Sea as the children of Israel but the great sea of Death. And he has done this as our pioneer, blazing the trail for us who follow him. For those who deny this, for the rest of the world, those without this faith, all they can do is walk to their inevitable end, like people with their eyes tight shut, walking towards the precipice. They are already dying but we have been reborn into Life. We are a new people: that is why we cannot live like the rest and join them on their stumbling over the edge.

The Eastern liturgies present this week the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ, of course, but also make reference to the Parousia, the Second Coming of Christ, this time in glory. The Parousia is the final intent and purpose in the mind of God whereby all things in this life will be brought to their End. This end is not the final running out of steam, a mere conclusion in the sense of being no more. Rather, end here means the very purpose and goal of the whole divine dispensation. Like the end of a race, the aim is not just to stop running but to win.

This intriguing mixture of Pascha with the Parousia, the Resurrection and the End, suggests that the raising of Christ from the dead is God's final and very clear statement to mankind, his creature; his final revelation before the End. All that is left is for time to run its course in God's good time, whilst to know the resurrection is ac-

tually to arrive at the end, that is, the very purpose of all things. We were reborn for this; we joined Christ in his death for this. This is our destiny.

Today the Church has become the cave where they laid him. Here he rests and in resting the Mosaic laws comes to its end and goal. Where of old God gave the last day of the week, the Saturday as a day of rest, Christ has now kept the perfect Sabbath rest and fulfilled the commandment. Where before, images were forbidden, now God has set before us an image, his very self in a human face; where once they were told of old, do not steal, God has come like a thief in the night and robbed Satan of his kingdom, despoiling him of souls held in bondage, harrowing hell and raising up those who had fallen. For where the Law came through Moses, grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ.

Every time we serve this communion sacrifice, we, the new Israel, his Church, manifest liturgically on earth an image of the heavenly realities. Each service holds within it, mystically, the very purpose and end of our human existence: resurrection in Christ. Isaac was the prototype, redeemed from death by a ram. Christ is the first fruits of the reality, who offered up his life-blood, just as the lambs of the old covenant were being slaughtered in the temple on the Day of Preparation. Then he rose again when the Sabbath was over; rising on the first day of the week, the Lord's Day, the first day of the new creation. We are that new creation of his, created at our baptism. So that, where the world sees only death, we see newness of life; where the outsiders pass by a tomb, we behold the marriage chamber.

We have indeed been baptized into Christ's death; we have died already – as St. Paul says, *'As many as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ.'*

## A Meditation

**O**n Holy Saturday the Church contemplates the mystery of the Lord's descent into Hades, the place of the dead. Death, our ultimate enemy, is defeated from within. Christ gave Himself as a ransom to death in which we were held captive, sold under sin. Descending into Hades through the Cross He loosed the bonds of death.

On Holy Saturday our focus is on the Tomb of Christ. This is no ordinary grave. It is not a place of corruption, decay and defeat. It is life-giving, a source of power, victory and liberation.

Holy Saturday is the day between Jesus' death and His resurrection. It is the day of watchful expectation, in which mourning is being transformed into joy. The day embodies in the fullest possible sense the meaning of "joyful sadness," which dominates the celebrations of the

Holy Week. St. Andrew of Crete penetrated this profound mystery, and helps us to understand it through the following poetic dialogue that he has devised between Jesus and His Mother:

*"Weep not for me, O Mother, beholding in the sepulcher the Son whom thou hast conceived without seed in thy womb. For I shall rise and shall be glorified, and as God I shall exalt in everlasting glory those who magnify thee with faith and love."*

*"O Son without beginning, in ways surpassing nature was I blessed at Thy strange birth, for I was spared all travail. But now beholding Thee, my God, a lifeless corpse, I am pierced by the sword of bitter sorrow. But arise, that I may be magnified."*

*"By mine own will the earth covers me, O Mother, but the gatekeepers of hell tremble as they see me, clothed in the bloodstained garment of vengeance: for on the Cross as God have I struck down mine enemies, and I shall rise again and magnify thee."*

*"Let the creation rejoice exceedingly, let all those born on earth be glad: for hell, the enemy, has been despoiled. Ye women, come to meet me with sweet spices: for I am delivering Adam and Eve with all their offspring, and on the third day I shall rise again."*

Holy Saturday is the day of the pre-eminent rest. Christ observes a Sabbath rest in the tomb. His rest, however, is not inactivity but the fulfillment of the divine will and plan for the salvation of humankind and the universe. He who brought all things into being, makes all things new. The re-creation of the world has been accomplished once and for all. Through His incarnation, life and death Christ has filled all things with Himself. He has opened a path for all flesh to the resurrection from the dead, since it was not possible that the author of life would be dominated by corruption.

Saint Paul tells us that *"God was in Jesus Christ reconciling the world to Himself"* (2 Cor 5:19). Hence, eternal life – real and self-generating – penetrated the depths of Hades. Christ who is the life of all destroyed death by His death. The Church knows herself to be the place, the eternal reality, where the presence of Christ vanquishes Satan, hell and death itself.

The solemn observance of Holy Saturday help us to recall and celebrate the great truth that despite the daily vicissitudes and contradictions of history and the abiding presence of hell within the human heart and human society, life has been liberated! Christ has broken the power of death.



## With Fear and Trembling

Miraculously, the Catholic Church has preserved the essence of *"the faith once for all delivered to the saints"* (Jude 3). By the sheer grace of God, Catholics have maintained the apostolic faith in the face of extraordinary pressures, from persecution and martyrdom to Western secularism and pluralism. Without that grace, Catholicism would have disappeared before the end of the first millennium. And with it would have disappeared *"true belief and true worship."*

Because of its God-given survival, Catholic Tradition continues to preserve, proclaim, and celebrate the truth about God and about mankind. It enables us to know God, to celebrate His saving work, and to participate in His very life. Catholic Tradition does nothing less than indicate to us and guide us along the Way that leads to the kingdom of heaven.

That way, nevertheless, includes an aspect that is particularly difficult to preserve and cultivate in modern society: the liturgy uses words that express awe — *"fear and trembling"* — before the ineffable mystery of the death and coming resurrection of God's eternal Son.

In the Divine Liturgy, we exhort one another to lay aside all earthly cares, in order to receive the King of all. Let all mortal flesh keep silence, and in fear and trembling stand, rendering nothing earthly-minded. For the King of kings, and the Lord of lords, comes to be slain, to give Himself as food to the faithful!

On Holy Saturday, as we commemorate Christ's repose in the tomb and His descent into the realm of the dead, we recall the price paid for our own liberation from death and corruption. We declare that He, the preexistent divine Son of the Father, came into our world and into our life for one purpose: to die, that through His death we might have life, lived in eternal communion with the Holy Trinity.

There is nothing in human experience, nor even in the human imagination, that could offer greater promise and greater joy than this central message of the Christian gospel. Yet for most of us, the most familiar and painful aspect of our Lenten journey is likely to be our inability to relate to that message — to that extraordinary promise — in a way that actually changes our life. Distraction, dispersion, and chaos, whether from outside or from deep within our own mind and heart, exercise their demonic influence in every phase of our daily life, while we are at work, with our friends or family, or in a liturgical office. And so we live our lives on the surface, feeling little and caring little for what is in fact the one thing in this world that really matters, the one thing that is truly needful.

Holy Saturday calls us back to what is essential. It reminds us that our life is a battle ground, where a constant struggle pits us against the Enemy, against the worst inclinations of our fallen nature. Appropriately, it calls us to engage in that struggle with fear, with trembling, and in silence.

One of the great "desert Fathers," Diodochos of Photicea, captured the vital link between inner silence and spiritual warfare with these words: *Spiritual knowledge comes through prayer, deep stillness and complete detachment. . . . When the soul's "spiritual wrath" is aroused against the passions, we should know it is time for silence, since the hour of battle is at hand.*

At the close of Holy Week, as we journey with our Lord toward His resurrection, we hear once again an invitation to enter into that silence: silence which is essential if we are to assume with real faithfulness the ascetic struggle that characterizes our entire life in Christ.

In that silence we stand in holy awe before the King of kings and Lord of lords. For a few moments we move beyond the superficiality of our social and cultural existence: the noise, the distraction, and the pointlessness of our daily routines. By the grace of God we discover at least a minimum of prayer, deep stillness, and detachment. In that stillness — in the silence granted to our mortal flesh — we contemplate the unfathomable depths of Jesus' sacrificial love, for ourselves and for all mankind. And with fear and trembling we receive Him as eucharistic food, the Bread of heaven, which nourishes us to eternal life.



# Ave, Mater Desolata

Points of Meditation in Honor of  
**THE DESOLATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN,**  
when Jesus was laid in the Sepulcher



*And from that hour the disciple took Her to his own.*

**W**ho can express the greatness of Mary's desolation, when She was left with John in the place of Her beloved Son?

The Prophet has described it in these words: *Weeping She hath wept in the night, and Her tears are on Her cheeks; there is none to comfort Her among all them that were dear to Her* (Lam. i. 2). *He hath made Me desolate, wasted with sorrow all the day long* (Lam. i. 13). She assuredly was not ignorant of God's command given by the Preacher: *Shed tears over the dead . . . and for fear of being ill-spoken of, weep bitterly . . . and make mourning for him according to his merits for a day or two, for fear of detraction* (Eccli. xxxviii. 16, 17, r8). And, indeed, Christ is called *the first-born from the dead* (Col. i. 18), and *the first-fruits of them that sleep* (1 Cor. xv. 20).

To Him then tears were due, to Him was due a bitter weeping in His burial, because of His infinite merits;

and this weeping was to last for a day or two, that is, for as many days as intervened before His resurrection.

Moreover, Mary's desolation had been foretold by Zacharias when, announcing the death of the Messiah, he says: *They shall mourn for Him as one mourneth for an only son, and they shall grieve over Him, as the manner is to grieve for the death of the first-born* (Zech. xii. io). Now Jesus, was at the same time Mary's *only Son*, and Her *first-born Son* (St. Matt. L 25); and therefore was Her weeping doubly bitter. It was the model of all weeping. And indeed, if we look upon Mary as the figure and model of the Church, we shall well understand that it became Her to represent in Her Person the weeping of the Church over Her divine Spouse.

Let us meditate upon Mary, weeping over the death of Her Son, not only in Her own name, but, as it were, in the name of the Eternal Father; for He would not that the cruel death of His Son should pass unmourned; and since, because of His infinite blessedness, He could not honor it with tears, this office was laid on Mary. Hence St. Bernard says that we cannot speak nor conceive of Mary's sorrow except by considering that it was grief adequate to such a Mother mourning for such a Son.

O Mother, how do I mourn with Thee in Thy desolation!

The Disciple sought to console Mary by taking *Her to his own*, by participating in Her sorrows, by remaining with Her. We, who were represented by St. John, should imitate him in his sympathy; for in the beloved disciple all the Faithful are designated; and (as St. Bernardine says) we may understand, mystically, in John the souls of the elect, of whom by love the Blessed Virgin is made the Mother.

Jeremias desired in spirit to console our Lady in Her bitter grief: *To what shall I equal Thee, that I may comfort Thee, O Virgin Daughter of Sion?* (Lam. ii. 13). We priests can give Her great consolation, if we meditate, and make our people meditate, on Her sorrows; especially in the devotion of the Seven Dolours, after the method of St. Bernard and St. Bonaventure. Let us promote among the Faithful devotion to *Maria Desolata*; that She may not have cause to complain of Priests as of Her friends: *I called My friends and they deceived Me* (St. Bernard).

When Almighty God established the sun and the moon in the firmament of heaven, and ordained that *the greater light should rule the day, and the lesser light the night* (Gen. i. 16), it was not without mystical meaning. For Jesus is *the Sun of Justice*, and went down, as it were, like the sun, in His death; and therefore we must have recourse to Mary, who is *beautiful as the moon*.

Even though She seems sometimes obscured by the clouds of Her most bitter sorrows, yet let us still turn our eyes towards Her. For our salvation She went to Calvary, rich with the treasure of Her Divine Son, but returned impoverished of that treasure: *The Almighty hath quite filled Me with bitterness: I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me back empty* (Ruth i. 20, 2r). As a second Rachel, she mourned for the loss of Her Son, and *found no comfort* (Jer. xxxi. 15). She uttered not a word (says St. Lawrence Justinian); for grief had absorbed Her heart. But whilst (as St Bernardine observes) a loss infinitely less caused the death of the wife of Phinees (1 Kings iv. r9), Mary, for our sake, sustained as by a miracle, survived Her anguish.

We too can console Her by thanking Her for all that She has suffered for us, praying to Her to impress the wounds of Her Son on our heart.

The care which the beloved disciple bestowed on the Mother of Jesus in Her desolation was surely well rewarded by Her Son (as St. Bernard says). We also, by sharing in Her sorrows, may look for our reward in a participation of Her glory. We shall know by experience that She is indeed, as She is called by the Church, the *Comforter of the afflicted*. Let us have recourse to Her in our tribulations, and we shall find Her the consolation of our soul. Let us also exhort the Faithful to honor Her in Her sorrow, while we teach them to do so by our example.



### Points of meditation

† Our Lady's desolation when she sees the stone rolled to the door of the Sepulcher. St. John, St. Joseph of Arimathea, and St. Mary Magdalen are with her. Mary has now reached the highest degree of sorrow, and her immaculate Heart, forced as it is to part from the remains of her only Beloved, is submerged in a sea of unutterable bitterness.

† Mary returns to Jerusalem, accompanied by St. John. She passes by the now desolate Cross and the stations of the Passion. She remembers Our Lord's words when weeping over Jerusalem, and she, as the daughter of Sion, mourns over the city.

† Mary in her solitude in Jerusalem. She revisits the place where Jesus celebrated the Last Supper, where He washed the Apostles' feet, and from whence Judas went forth to betray Him. Unutterable aspirations of Mary's desolate heart, seeking for her Beloved, and following Him in thought to Limbo, whither, accompanied by the one witness of His death, the penitent thief, He is

gone to release the souls of the Patriarchs and the old testament Saints. With St. John and Mary Magdalen and the other Marys, she honors the crown of thorns, the nails, and all the instruments of the Passion. She receives again to her maternal embrace St. Peter, and the other apostles and disciples who had forsaken, and denied Him, and fled.

† Three degrees of sorrow – That of our Lady's immaculate Heart, knowing all, understanding and penetrating all. – That of St. John's virginal nature, tender, deep, and compassionate. – That of St. Mary Magdalen, contrite, intense, and vehement.

† Ask for a greater devotion to the Passion of Jesus and the Sorrows of Mary.



*Ave Maria doloribus plena, Crucifixus tecum, lacrymabilis Tu in mulieribus, et lacrymabilis fructus ventris tui Jesus. Sancta Maria Mater Crucifixi, lacrymas impertire nobis crucifixoribus Filii tui, nunc et in hora mortis nostrae. Amen*

*Hail, Mary, full of sorrows, the Crucified is with Thee; worthy of compassion art Thou amongst women, and worthy of compassion is the fruit of Thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of the Crucified, obtain for us, the crucifiers of Thy Son, tears of compunction, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.*

\* A Plenary Indulgence is granted to all who, from three o'clock on Good Friday until twelve o'clock on holy Saturday (when the Church invites the faithful to rejoice in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ), shall, either in public or private, spend an hour or half hour in meditating the desolation of our Blessed Lady.

\* An Indulgence of 300 days on other Fridays whenever, between three o'clock on that day and the dawn of Sunday, they practice this devotion.

\* Plenary Indulgence each month to all who have practiced it every week in the month, provided they go to Confession and Communion on one of the last days of the devotion.