

Reflection for Holy Saturday 2020

Text: Psalm 31: 19-24

How abundant is your goodness, O Lord, which you have laid up for those who fear you; which you have prepared in the sight of all for those who put their trust in you.

You hide them in the shelter of your presence from those who slander them; you keep them safe in your refuge from the strife of tongues.

Blessed be the Lord! For he has shown me his steadfast love when I was as a city besieged.

I had said in my alarm, 'I have been cut off from the sight of your eyes. Nevertheless, you heard the voice of my prayer when I cried out to you.

Love the Lord, all you his servants; for the Lord repays the faithful, but repays to the full the proud.

Be strong and let your heart take courage, all you who wait in hope for the Lord

Holy Saturday, a strange day, a nondescript day, an in-between day lying as it does in the Norman's-land between the horrors and utter despair of Good Friday and all the wonder, the glory and the mystery of Easter Sunday. What must that first Holy Saturday have been like for the eleven remaining disciples, Jesus's closest and most trusted followers? For them of course there could be no inkling that it was anything other than another Sabbath to be strictly observed in the safety of a locked room. Locked because as we are told they 'feared the Jews'; those strict adherents of the religion that Jesus had challenged for its narrow-mindedness, its pettiness and above all its failure to display God's love to all people, not just the chosen few, the Jewish elite. The Jews whose over-riding desire was to preserve the status quo, not to rock the boat or upset the apple cart. The status quo that nothing was done to disturb the carefully brokered relationship with their ruling overlords, the Romans, which ensured that for them at least that their practice of the religious life could continue alongside all the privileges acquired by their assumed status as the leaders, the hierarchy of that religion. No hint of insurrection or any other form of challenge to the Imperial power must be permitted and hence as we know their fear of just what Jesus might have done to upset and provoke the Romans and place the well-being and comfort of their future at risk. And having, as they thought, successfully and cleverly disposed of that particular risk there remained Jesus's disciples who also might possibly continue in His footsteps and continue to preach and teach a radical gospel, a radical response

to God's love shown to all people through Jesus; perhaps these too must be dealt with and condemned to death.

Knowing all this it is no wonder that those eleven men hid behind closed doors and feared to go out into the streets of Jerusalem. Closeted there they could also hide their grief from prying or contemptuous eyes; grief that must have threatened to overwhelm them. Grief for the death of the man who had taught them everything of value; who had shown them a new way of living to the glory of God; who had opened their eyes so that they could begin to perceive and understand so much more of the wonder and the mystery that is God. But now their hopes for a new dawn, a new form of religion, a new trust in the grace and mercy of God were shattered in the death of Jesus on that cross set high on Calvary. How could a dead man possibly be their Saviour? And so in closeted exclusion they wept for the death of the best friend and master whom they would ever know, the death of hope and, added to these tears, the tears of bitter realisation of their own failings when Jesus needed them most. Their abject cowardice, their self-preserving fear that led to their deserting Him; running to apparent safety as Jesus alone and unsupported by any human being faced His trials at the hands of first the Jewish powers and then at those of the Romans. For these cowed and humiliated men this was surely no **Holy Saturday** but a day of deepest remorse and sadness.

The question now is just what are we doing this Holy Saturday? In a normal year many of us might be busy putting the finishing touches to beautiful flower arrangements in our churches and rejoicing in the transformation after the bleak days of Lent. Again, many of us might well be doing a final big shop for the feasting on Easter Sunday; picking up and examining the various treats on offer; filling trolleys to the brim and the only shortages might be along the shelves which were once stuffed with Easter Eggs of every description from the ludicrously extravagant to the more humble cream eggs. Others might be going to a sports fixture to join in the vociferous cheering and exuberant clapping imbibing the heady mixture of exhilaration and despair as the fortunes of a closely fought game swing back and forth. Others, if the day is fine might make it to the seaside or some beauty spot to enjoy the fresh air caressing one's cheeks, the touch of warm sunlight on one's skin and the touch too of hands linked and held as, together with family or friends, one delights in the freedom of such a day. And then as the day draws to a close maybe there is that glass of wine or other refreshing drink held in one's hand to be lifted and savoured in the convivial companionship of others. And, if one is honest, probably not a day which has anything especially holy about it. Good Friday is behind us, Easter Day lies in front and Holy Saturday as I've suggested is simply an in-between day, a

nothing special day where God is probably barely allowed to touch the events one chooses to pursue.

But this year is different; radically different and we cannot do any of the things we would have done in the past. We must, as far as is possible, stay securely in our homes and a trip to the shops must only be made if absolutely essential and if we do go we will discover that it is other more basic commodities than Easter Eggs that do not appear on the shelves. No churches to decorate, no sport to watch, no trips out bar that permitted twenty minutes or so of outdoor exercise and, if the glass of wine is imbibed it will only be in at most the company of those who now make up your daily household. The Corona Virus has yet again revealed its power to touch all our lives in a way which would have been unimaginable a few weeks back.

So, are we going to allow ourselves to succumb to fear and anxiety as to the future as those disciples did on that Sabbath? Are we going to mourn for all that seems to be lost or to have been destroyed or and be touched by grief or, are we going to wait in holy silence for the dawning of Easter Day and the revealing of the light; the light of the world, the light of Christ's redeeming love shining into our world? The light that nothing in heaven or in earth has the power to destroy. I pray that we can all heed the wonderful words of the verses of the psalm I chose for today's text and feel the power of those words to keep us strong in faith and in trust in the Lord's good purposes for us and all His children this Holy Saturday.

Be strong and let your heart take courage, all you who wait in hope for the Lord.

*"This is the time to be slow,
Lie low to the wall
Until the bitter weather passes.
Try, as best you can, not to let
The wire brush of doubt
Scrape from your heart
All sense of yourself
And your hesitant light.
If you remain generous,
Time will come good;
And you will find your feet
Again on fresh pastures of promise,
Where the air will be kind
And blushed with beginning." John O' Donohue*