

Reflection for Holy Saturday 2020

There is an ancient homily for Holy Saturday that contains the words 'The whole earth keeps silent because the king is asleep'. Yesterday the theme was aloneness, today it is silence. And again, this year we are more aware of the silence of Holy Saturday than ever before. Usually on Holy Saturday, while some of us are busy decorating our churches and preparing for the Easter liturgies, the roads are full of cars on their way to visit family, or to go to the beach, or to some other tourist attraction or beauty spot. But not this year. This year the roads, and the beauty spots and the tourist attractions are silent too. The office hymn for this morning begins 'His cross stands empty in a world grown silent'. This is a day of silence.

But the silence of this day is not a silence of emptiness, it is a silence of tense anticipation. Imagine dropping a tennis ball onto a hard surface. The ball drops, down and down until it collides with the ground. It squashes up as it cannot drop any further, and just for a fraction of a second it has stopped falling and all the energy of its fall is built up inside. The ball is very briefly motionless and static, but it is not at all an empty stop. Then that energy is all released and the ball bounces up again. The energy of the fall gives power to the bounce. At the time of the first Easter, the friends of Jesus were demoralized and confused. They knew what he had said about rising again, but they simply hadn't grasped what this might mean. For them Holy Saturday was the day after the catastrophe. But we know how the story continues. We know that the day after the disaster is really the day before the miracle. We know that on Holy Saturday the extraordinary power of God is building and gathering momentum ready to burst open the tomb and change the world. Like that tennis ball at the moment when it is still, neither moving down nor up, the tomb is filled with an incredible energy, waiting to burst forth.

So, on this Holy Saturday we are waiting. The earth is buzzing beneath our feet with the power of the crucified Christ who is about to rise. This is a day of extraordinary potential. As we continue to live in the extraordinary time of coronavirus lockdown, we cannot be sure how it will end, or if it will ever really end. It may well be that life will never again be as it was. But, all the same, like Holy Saturday, this is a time of potential. It is not a dead and static time of inactivity, it is like the first Holy Saturday a time pregnant with hope and with new opportunity, a time when the power of God is at work. For some of us this time is very trying, very difficult and very worrying. But for all of us it is a time when there is work to be done what sort of people do we want to be when the stone is finally rolled back? What sort of lives do we want to lead? What new things do we want to do, and what old things are we determined never to go back to? What new skills do we need, and can we start to develop them even now? It is tempting to relapse into sorrow at what we are missing, just as the disciples were sorrowful at the life with Jesus that had ended. But the present is never just a sad echo of the past, it is the birthplace of the future. God has plans for us that may be challenging and difficult, but will certainly be full of his power and his love. This is a day of silence, but it is a silence heavy with future hope, future possibilities.