

HOLY SATURDAY

The pain of Good Friday is over, Jesus has at least been given a decent burial, presumably surrounded by his loved ones, his mother, the women, a few disciples including Joseph of Arimathea (who gave up his own tomb for the guest) and Nicodemus. As the darkness falls they sadly make their ways home to observe the Sabbath, which in Jewish tradition starts at sunset the “previous” day.

Would they now be wondering what the new normal, life without Jesus would be like, and gradually they maybe were looking at ways to carry on. Would it be business as usual, or what?

For us, Holy Saturday has a strange feeling of emptiness....our churches are still empty of decoration, flowers and ornament, but in normal times people would be down at church, taking advantage of less clutter so they can give the church a good spring clean, flower arrangers are busy, someone is creating an Easter garden. Maybe the Vicar or AN Other is practising the Exsultet for singing at the Easter Vigil as darkness falls.

The strange thing is, practising the Exsultet is just about the only normal thing I can do in this locked down Easter. And later I will practise it, and even later I will sing it as it becomes dark. It is a triumphant shout of joy at the Resurrection, it proclaims the victory of the Risen Christ, not just in human terms but cosmically as well, the angels join in the celebration. ALL is redeemed by Christ's victory over the powers of sin and death, as surely as the children of Israel were delivered from slavery in Egypt, so too are we delivered. Even in these strange lockdown times.

It might seem a little odd to start celebrating Easter on the previous evening, but as in Jewish tradition, Easter day starts as night falls. And we know that early the next morning as dawn breaks Mary Magdalene goes for a life changing walk, when she learns that something wonderful, beyond her understanding, and wildest hopes has already happened in the tomb. The world can never be quite the same again.

Here are some of the words from this ancient hymn of the church, sung in elaborate chant:-

*Rejoice, heavenly powers! Sing choirs of angels!
O Universe, dance around God's throne! Jesus our King is risen!
Sound the victorious trumpet of salvation.
Rejoice, O earth, in glory, revealing the splendour of your creation,
radiant in the brightness of your triumphant King!
Christ has conquered! Now his life and glory fill you!
Darkness vanishes for ever!
Rejoice, O Mother Church! Exult in glory!
The risen Saviour, our Lord of life, shines upon you!
Let this place resound with joy, echoing the mighty song of all God's people.*

This is just the opening, but it continues, reminding us of God's saving acts and focusing on the Paschal Candle which has been lit just before, and is an essential part of the service. Later we will bring to mind our baptismal promises, or even admit new church members during this service.

Surely this is what John was thinking about when he said:-

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

Tonight we can all say to those in our households, or simply address the world in general “Christ is risen Alleluia”.

With Easter greetings to you all

Alice