Holy Saturday

Gospel text ( ):

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Fr. Enric CATALÁN Andrés
(Sant Cugat del Vallès, Barcelona, Spain)

Today we celebrate the great rest of Holy Saturday. Within the Easter Triduum, we often focus our attention on the Passion or the Resurrection of the Lord, but we easily forget the link between the two events: Holy Saturday. Perhaps this happens because the profound silence of this day is quickly drowned out by the noise of our world. And yet, it is in this silence that the word acquires meaning. The death of Jesus is not symbolic: it is real. He has not only united himself with the living—in his incarnation—but, from the tomb, he has also united himself with the dead.

A woman from the parish of Sabadell (Spain) visited the cemetery every Saturday; she said she liked the peace of the place. And indeed, “cemetery” means “dormitory” in Greek, a place of rest after great activity. Yesterday—Good Friday—Jesus completed the work of redemption. Today, in the tomb, He rests. He does not act. He is pure, trusting passivity. He abandons himself into the hands of the Father, knowing that He will be set free.

Christ's descent goes beyond the tomb: he goes down to hell, to the abyss, to the realm of the dead. Like Jonah inside the sea monster, Jesus knows death from within, he fathoms it, just as we too will one day. But Holy Saturday affirms not only that the Son of God has rested among the dead, but also that he has returned from there. The Father has not left him in that realm, but has freed him from its bonds. The monster of death could not hold captive the One whom the Father loves.

And if it could not hold Him, neither will it hold those who have heard his voice: the righteous who rested in death. This is the profound mystery of Holy Saturday, a silence more eloquent than a thousand words. Let us prepare ourselves, in this silence, for Easter. For the renewed word we will hear tonight. “Therefore my heart is glad, my soul rejoices; my body also dwells secure” (Psalm 16:9).

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “For what idea could the human person have of God before, except maybe that of an idol which his own heart had made? Once God was incomprehensible and inaccessible, invisible and entirely unthinkable. But now He wanted us to be able to understand him. How was this done? By lying in a manger, preaching on a mountain, praying through the night, and hanging on a cross...” (Saint Bernard)

- “The divine darkness of this day, of this century which is increasingly becoming one long Holy Saturday, is speaking to our conscience. It holds something of comfort for us. The death of God in Jesus Christ is at the same time the expression of his radical solidarity with us. The most obscure mystery of the faith is at the same time the clearest sign of a hope without end.” (Benedict XVI)

- “Christ's death was a real death in that it put an end to his earthly human existence. But because of the union which the person of the Son retained with his body, his was not a mortal corpse like others, for ‘it was not possible for death to hold him’ (Acts 2:24) (...). Jesus' Resurrection ‘on the third day’ (I Cor 15:4) was the sign of this, also because bodily decay was held to begin on the fourth day after death.” (Catechism Of The Catholic Church, Nº 627)

Other comments

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Fr. Jacques PHILIPPE
(Cordes sur Ciel, France)

Today, we do not consider any particular Gospel, inasmuch it is a day with no liturgy. But, with Mary, the only one who stayed firm in faith and hope after the tragic death of her Son, we shall prepare ourselves, in silence and in prayer, to celebrate the feast of our liberation in Christ, that is, the fulfillment of the Gospel.

The sequential coincidence of events between our Lord’s Death and Resurrection and the annual Jewish celebration of Passover, commemoration of their liberation from slavery in Egypt, allows us to understand the feeling of liberation spread by the Cross of Jesus, new Paschal lamb whose blood preserves us from death.

Another less remarkable time coincidence, but, nevertheless, rich in meaning, refers to the weekly Jewish holiday of the "Sabbat". It is observed from sundown on Friday, when the mothers in the family turn on the lights in every Jewish home, until dusk on Saturday. This is a reminder that after the work of creation, after having created the world out of nothing, the seventh day God rested. He wished man to rest also the seventh day, as thanksgiving of the beauty of the Creator’s work, and as a sign of the covenant of love between God and Israel. In the Jewish Sabbat liturgy God is invoked as the Israel spouse. The Sabbath is the day that encourages everyone to welcome the peace of God, His "Shalom".

In this way, after the painful work of the Cross, «variation where man is forged again» according to Catherine of Siena's own words, Jesus begins His rest at the very moment when the first lights of Sabbat are turned on: "It is finished" (Jn 19:30).

Now the work of the new creation has been completed: man, once prisoner of the oblivion of sin, becomes a new creature in Christ. A new covenant between God and mankind, that no one will ever shatter, has just been sealed. Henceforth, all infidelity may be washed in the blood and water that flow from the cross.

The letter to the Hebrews says: «there remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God» (Heb 4:9). Our faith in Christ gives us access to it. That He gives us our true rest, our deep peace, not for one day, but for life, and that it may be a total hope in God's infinite mercy, according to the invitation of Psalm 16: «my flesh also dwells secure, for you will not abandon my soul to Sheol». That with a new heart we shall prepare ourselves to celebrate in joy the wedding of the Lamb and that we allow ourselves to become fully united for the love of God in Christ.

Other comments

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Fr. Joan BUSQUETS i Masana
(Sabadell, Barcelona, Spain)

Today in fact, there is no "Gospel" to meditate upon or perhaps we should rather meditate upon the whole Gospel with capital letters (the Good News), because it all ends in what we are today recalling: Jesus surrendering to Death so that He can rise again and give us a New Life.

Today, the Church remains by our Lord's tomb, while meditating upon his Passion and Death. We shall not celebrate the Eucharist until the day will be over, until tomorrow, when it will start with the Solemn Vigil of the Resurrection. Today, is a day of silence, of affliction, of sadness, of thinking and waiting. Today, we dot not find the Holy Eucharist to be reserved in the Sacrarium. There is only the remembrance and the sign of his "love to the end", the Holy Cross we devotedly adore.

Today, is the day to be by Mary, his mother. We have to stay by her to be able to understand a little the significance of this tomb we are watching over. She, who with loving tenderness was keeping in his motherly heart those mysteries she did not quite understand from that Son of hers, who was the Saviour of us all, is now sad and hurt: «He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him» (Jn 1:11). It is also the sadness of the other mother, the Holy Church, that suffers the rejection of so many men and women that have not sheltered Him, who was Light and Life for them.

Today, while praying together with these two mothers, Christ followers ponder and repeat the antiphon of the prayer of Laudes: «He humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name» (cf. Phil 2:8-9).

Today, the faithful Christian listens to the Ancient Homily about the Holy Saturday the Church reads in the liturgy of the Office of Readings: «There is a great silence on earth today, a great silence and stillness. The whole earth keeps silence because the King is asleep. The earth trembled and is still because God has fallen asleep in the flesh and He has raised up all who have slept ever since the world began. God has died in the flesh and hell trembles with fear».

Let us prepare to commemorate the solitude of Mary to live the brightness of Resurrection and to celebrate and proclaim —when this sad day is over— with the other mother, the Holy Church: Jesus Christ has risen, just as he said! (cf. Mt 28:6).