

LOVE. TEACH. HEAL.

Our Mission Guided by the Love of Jesus Christ

A Holy Week Reflection

O God, Creator of heaven and earth: Grant that, as the crucified body of your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Sabbath, so we may await with him the coming of the third day, and rise with him to newness of life; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

—Collect for Holy Saturday, BCP p. 283

Dear Friends in Christ,

Many years ago on Holy Saturday morning, a small group, all of us in our 20s, gathered in the nave of Saint Bede's in Santa Fe, New Mexico. It was a brilliantly sunny day. The desert light poured through the windows, bathing the floor, the altar, the extinguished candles and sanctuary lamp. The priest, dressed only in a black cassock, entered silently, and took a seat with us. The quiet was absolute. We sat for several minutes. We stared at the aumbry, its door open. It was full of shadows.



I had never thought very much about the reserved Sacrament in that little box under its little lamp; but now it was empty. I had just assumed Christ was always in His Church, would always be there. In the stillness, I was stunned by the thought of the Lord's utter absence. All the signs pointed to it: He was gone, hidden by death. The sadness of it overwhelmed me.

I have held the hands of many people in their last hours, many times as a priest, sometimes as a friend, twice as a son. One moment, they are there, and in the next they are not. Where they go, and how they go, is veiled from our sight. We can send them on with prayers and song, but we cannot go with them. We are left with the remains: a broken cord, a testimony to what was.

The Collect for Holy Saturday calls this "rest." *The crucified body of your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Sabbath.* For those who must let go of the dead, however, it feels like loss, not rest. There are more tears than peace, and other things as well – regret, sometimes anger, at times even despair.

And yet, the Collect is clear. Jesus *rested*: hidden in death, yes, but not obliterated, not destroyed by it. Somehow, on the other side of the veil, Christ was doing His work, enduring death to change it, not only for Himself, but for us, and for all time. Just as in His Incarnation, our Lord inhabits our nature to redeem it, so now He inhabits our death to transform it, from a dead end to an open door, from sterile soil to the seed-ground of a new creation: *so we may await with Him the coming of the third day, and rise with Him to newness of life.*

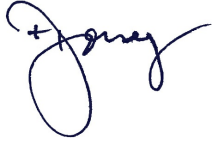
On that day long ago, in that little church, the priest stood with us all. We heard the Scriptures, sang the anthem, said the Lord's Prayer, prayed the Grace. Then we left. As I pushed open the door, the full mid-day light of the desert hit me with something more than sunshine. I was flooded with a sense of glory, of Christ's love and joy and power over death. I have no idea why, but it lasted for several minutes, as though the whole creation were singing a silent song of praise. I sat motionless in my car while my eyes welled up and overflowed.

What Christ will do with our death, in our graves, He now does with our life, in our souls. He moves into all the broken, fearful, heartsick shadows of our thought and feeling and fills them with His promise of

life and peace. He speaks His word of hope, saying, *Let go and wait for me*. Easter is coming. His has already happened. Ours is on the way, the third day that will never end, whose light reaches us even now.

Let us walk through Holy Week being fed by this hope. Let us be attentive to our regrets and griefs, knowing that Jesus Christ in His death has inhabited every last one and made them His own. Whatever the shadows in which you stand, know the night is nearly over. Look toward the dawn, the Garden, the Tomb that waits to be opened. The morning is at hand. It will not be long.

Faithfully your bishop,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Dorsey', with a small cross symbol at the beginning.

(The Right Reverend) Dorsey W.M. McConnell, D.D.
VIII Bishop of Pittsburgh
March 24, 2018

