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Meditations: Holy Saturday

Reflections for Holy Saturday. The topics are: hope illuminates Holy Saturday; those who accompany Christ in his abandonment; Mary consoles and strengthens us in difficult moments.

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IT COULD BE that Holy Saturday is “the day of the Easter Triduum that we most neglect, anxious to move from Friday’s Cross to Sunday’s Alleluia.”[1] To prevent this from

happening to us, we can focus on the women who accompanied our Lady at all times. “For them, as for us, it was the darkest hour. But in this situation the women did not remain paralyzed. They did not give in to the dark forces of regret and remorse. They did not withdraw into pessimism. They did not flee from reality. They did something simple and extraordinary: in their homes they prepared perfume for the Body of Jesus ... Without knowing it, in the darkness of that Sabbath, these women were preparing for the dawn of the ‘first day of the week,’ the day that would change history.”[2]

Today, Christ lies in the tomb. Friendly hands have lovingly placed him there, near Calvary, in the tomb owned by Joseph of Arimathea. Where are the apostles? The Gospels tell us nothing, but perhaps in the evening of that Sabbath they came, one by one, to the Upper Room,

where a few days earlier they had gathered with the Master. How discouraged their conversations now were! They had betrayed Jesus. Their dejection must have been so great that perhaps they even thought of abandoning everything and going back to the way things were, as if the last three years had been only a dream.

However, “in the silence of Holy Saturday, filled with God’s boundless love, we live in expectation of the dawn of the third day, the dawn of the triumph of God’s love, the dawn of the light that allows the eyes of the heart to see life, difficulties and suffering in a new way. Hope illuminates our failures, our disappointments, our bitterness, which seem to mark the collapse of everything.”[3]

THE DIFFERENT REACTION of the holy women is striking: they were

faithful to the end. They watched attentively how events were unfolding so that, after the Sabbath rest, they could return and finish embalming Jesus' Body. Their discouragement is understandable: neither the apostles nor they were yet witnesses of Christ's resurrection. In spite of everything, they do not want to forego this final service. Their affection is stronger than death.

The courage of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus also is an example for us. "In the hour of loneliness, of total abandonment and of scorn, it is then that they stand up for him. With them," said Saint Josemaría, "I too will go up to the foot of the Cross; I will press my arms tightly round the cold Body, the corpse of Christ, with the fire of my love. I will unnail it, with my reparation and mortifications. I will wrap it in the new winding-sheet of my clean life,

and I will bury it in the living rock of my breast, where no one can tear it away from me!”[4] They have nothing to gain, they may lose everything, but they still want to offer Jesus their affection.

But Holy Saturday could not have been a sad day for our Lady, even if it was a painful one. Faith, hope, and the most tender love for her divine Son would have given her peace, enabling her to await the resurrection with serene longing. Mary would also have remembered the last words of Jesus: “Woman, behold your son” (*Jn 19:26*). And she would already have begun to exercise her motherhood with those men and women who had followed Christ from the earliest times. Our Lady would have tried to revive the faith and hope of the apostles, reminding them of the words they had heard a short time earlier from our Lord’s lips: “They will mock him,

and spit upon him, and scourge him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise” (*Mk 10:34*). Our Lord had spoken very clearly so that, when the time of tribulation came, they would hold fast to his word in faith. Along with the painful memory of the sufferings endured by Jesus, a great relief would come over her motherly heart at the thought that everything was now over: “The work of our Redemption has been accomplished. We are now children of God, because Jesus has died for us and his death has ransomed us.”[5]

ALONGSIDE OUR LADY, in the light of her hope, the hearts of each of the apostles would have been enkindled. “What if all this is true?” perhaps they. “What if Jesus has really risen, as he promised?” In the past they had all been united around the Son. Now they would like to be close to his Mother. Mary may even have sent one of them to look for those who

hadn't turned up yet. She may have hoped to find Thomas to comfort his fear-filled heart. In the moment of trial, they were eager to turn to Mary, and "with her, how easy it is."[6]

We want to find a support for our faith in hers: especially when things become difficult, when moments of darkness come. Saint Bernard assures us from his own experience: "If the winds of temptation arise, if you trip on the stumbling blocks of tribulations, look to the Star, call on Mary."[7] God wants her to be for us an advocate, a mother, a sure way to find the light again in times of darkness.

Those who have recourse to the powerful intercession of our Lady know that it has never been said that anyone who trusted in her was left unaided, no matter how difficult the moment or how great the confusion in their heart. And we can say to

Jesus: “In spite of the sadness we may harbor, we will feel that we must hope, because with you the Cross blossoms into Resurrection, because you are with us in the darkness of our nights; you are certainty in our uncertainties, word in our silences, and nothing can ever rob us of the love you have for us.”[8] Close to Mary, mother of hope, our faith in the merits of her Son Jesus will grow strong once again.

[1] Francis, Homily, 11 April 2020.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Benedict XVI, Remarks at the end of the Stations of the Cross, 2 April 2010.

[4] Saint Josemaría, *The Way of the Cross*, 14th Station, 1.

[5] Saint Josemaría, *The Way of the Cross*, 14th Station.

[6] Saint Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 513.

[7] Saint Bernard, *Homiliae super “Missus est,”* 2, 17.

[8] Francis, Homily, 11 April 2020.

(Image: *Holy Women at the Empty Tomb*, Fra Angelico. Wiki Commons)