

## HOLY SATURDAY 2021 – ‘When Christ literally goes to hell and back’

from Fr. Mike.

**Exodus 14.10-31; 15.20-21 & Matthew 27.57- 66**

### Collect for Easter Eve

**Grant, O Lord, that as we are baptized into the death of thy blessed Son our saviour Jesus Christ, so by continual mortifying our corrupt affections we may be buried with him; and that through the grave, and gate of death, we may pass to our joyful resurrection; for his merits, who died, and was buried, and rose again for us, thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

*Firstly, please listen to the V. Williams piece of music (words in purple below)*

**‘Come love, come Lord, and that long day**

**For which I languish, come away.**

**When this dry soul those eyes shall see**

**And drink the unseal’d source of Thee,**

**When glory’s sun faith’s shades shall chase,**

**Then for Thy veil give me Thy face.’**

*(Richard Crawshaw, 1613-1649)*

This is the final day of Passiontide. Those of you who were in church for Maundy Thursday would have listened to these words of a metaphysical English priest and poet, sung by a tenor, and set to the haunting music of Ralph Vaugh Williams. This short piece gently began our Triduum and speaks to this moment. Approaching the Blessed Sacrament in one kind – deprived this year of Christ’s blood, in obedient response to the PHE guidelines for Coronavirus – it is only too evident that things are very different, and yet curiously perhaps, they are the same as they ever were!

One of the ways the devil succeeds is by presenting evil as being so ‘reasonable.’ It makes sense, does it not, to receive the sacrament in one kind only, to avoid passing the deadly virus through a shared chalice.... and yet...although scientifically correct, and on the face of it, making perfect (reasonable) sense in the current climate, if we

look theologically the picture may be slightly different? The blood of our Lord Jesus, the Christ, the **'unseal'd' source** of God – in effect, perfection itself, surely cannot transmit either evil or disease? This too makes perfect sense. Therefore, to deny the faithful the opportunity to 'do this' completely in both kinds as commanded 2021 years ago is in one sense, absurd! Your reaction to this statement will be determined by what you believe actually happens at Holy Communion. Perhaps we are being deceived by demonic 'reasonableness' to some extent. Whatever the truth of this, I remain thankful for small mercies (allowing the faithful to receive in 'one kind' is better than not receiving the sacrament at all).

Do you **'Languish?'**

When a person, animal or plant 'languishes' they either lose or lack vitality; grow weak. Another definition of languishing is when we are forced to remain in an unpleasant place or situation. Our Watches, Compline services, prayers, Vigils and the like, all culminate naturally in Holy Saturday and place Christ firmly in the darkness of the tomb. **Sadly, many Christians may simply choose to leave Him there...**

**A fleeing Taliban, desperate for water, was plodding through the desert when he saw something far off in the distance, looking a bit like an oasis. Hoping to find water, he hurried towards the spot, only to find a British soldier selling, of all things, regimental ties! The Taliban asked, "Do you have water?"**

**The soldier replied "There is no water here, the well is dry. Would you like to buy a tie instead? They are only £5." The Taliban shouted "You idiot infidel! I do not need an over-priced tie, that means nothing to me. I need WATER! I should kill you for this insult, but I must find water first."**

**“OK” said the soldier, “It does not matter that you do not want to buy a tie, or that you hate me. I will show you that I am a better human being than that; I shall rise above your hate and offer help. Listen carefully... If you continue over that hill overnight, to the east, you will find our ‘Officer’s Mess.’ It is our home but we often accept guests, especially those in need. For you, it is like an oasis, with all the ice-cold water you will ever need. Inshallah.” Cursing him, the Taliban grudgingly staggered over the hill as directed. Several hours later, he staggered back, and just before collapsing with dehydration he rasped...**

**“They won’t let me in without a tie!”**

His thirst certainly made him weak, and his frustrations added an additional burden (an inner-tomb?) and as a result, the journey took many more hours than needed.

We sometimes risk missing the point, tending to keep Christ in the tomb. Trying to be ‘reasonable,’ to meet Him, but only on our terms...fumbling about in the darkness, following our own agenda and allowing our feelings to dominate.

Sometimes God presents us with situations (even during pandemic) that can appear pointless. We are often tempted in such times to either ignore, become selectively blind or simply just to give up.

Holy Saturday reminds us that it is Christ who refreshes us. He languished in Hell, deliberately – for US – so that we do not have to languish, ever – in this world or the next. Consequently, He provides all we could ever desire, even when we do not deserve it (can you truly believe that?!).

He still offers the very waters of life to those who accept that unconditional love is key to being human. In the same way that thoughts are not facts, darkness, thirst,

confusion, fear, doubt, negativity or disease is not permanent. It is simply a necessary stage before the dawn can arrive to clarify our thoughts and allow us to begin again. Therefore, our mission as disciples is to honestly fulfil the purposes for which each one of us has been created. This requires a concerted effort to stare faithfully into the darkness of the tomb, daring to believe the seemingly impossible, namely that The Light is indeed inbound, and will replace the gloom.

Things *will* change for the better. There is always Hope. Although in order to understand this we need the courage to be vulnerable, trusting in God's benevolence to lead us home over the horizon – but in His time, and at His pace; at and in His direction, not ours!

So, at this most mysterious and challenging point of Holy Week, why not reflect in the darkness of this moment upon Crawshaw's (purple) words, and make them your prayer? Genuinely seek the face of Christ to become your face, allowing his unconditional love to shine through the veil which is our present face. Pray for your visage and behaviour to be changed by His perfect likeness. Going forward, let yourself become, in effect, the person God longs for you to be.

This is the night we remember that Christ literally went 'to Hell and back' just for us, so that our tomb is reduced, in the eternal scheme of things, to a temporary moment.

Tonight then, please let yourself be prepared. If you need a spiritual tie, now is the time to acquire one. How? Let yourself be drawn to the light of the Paschal Candle and thereby refreshed by the promised intimacy of Holy Communion on the day to follow; which is the day of Resurrection! ('**Come love, come Lord...**')

Fr. Mike Holy Saturday 2021.