



The Reverend Anthony Estes, Assistant Rector
Sermon
Holy Saturday
April 3, 2021

Readings: Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24; 1 Peter 4:1-8
Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16
Gospel: Matthew 27:57-66

Holy Saturday Spirituality

When I first started coming around the Episcopal Church, I had the privilege of working with a priest as I prepared worship bulletins as an intern. One time, while I was preparing the funeral service leaflet, the priest said to me, "*You know, Anthony, the funeral liturgy in the Book of Common Prayer is probably one of our most beautiful services.*"

At the time, I thought that was an odd thing to say...because a funeral liturgy is a service to say goodbye to a loved one. That's what I thought at the time.

But the longer I've been in the Episcopal Church and worshipping with my sisters and brothers and using its liturgy, I think that priest was right.

One of the things that the Prayer Book says is that our funeral liturgies are Easter liturgies.

Its tone and tenor is one of celebration as well as condolence...one of joy...and of hope.

Phrases come to mind like..."in sure and certain hope," hymns like *Amazing Grace*.

Incense, candles, Easter lilies.

But I also think that the funeral liturgy is more specifically like Holy Saturday, the day between the death and resurrection of Jesus, our Christ.

When our loved ones die in the *hope* of the resurrection, we are like all of those first followers of Jesus in Jerusalem so many years ago when he died: hopeful, waiting, afraid, sad.

When I was doing clinical pastoral education at a hospital in the area, I was paged to a hospice room where a patient had died.

And when I entered the room, the patient's relative was there. And that person said to me that their relative had died.

And immediately, out of nowhere, the patient's relative began to clap their hands! And shout that God was victorious! And that the deceased had finished their work and *gone home* to be with *God!* (I mean, this was at 3:00 in the morning!)

And I knew deep down inside at that moment, that response was natural and uncontrived and deeply spiritual and faithful.

The relative wasn't ignoring the tragedy...but acknowledged it...and was looking forward, in hope, to see the departed again.

Holy Saturday is such a time.

And it is a spiritual and an emotional space where, in the *face of death*, we are invited to clap...and sing...and keep hope...and be prepared for the life of the world to come.

Holy Saturday spirituality is about *believing* when it's *hard* to believe.

Holy Saturday is also about so much more than grieving...with hope. It's about *living* in the meantime.

It is like what the letter of 1 Peter says, "Living by the will of God."

Taking our share in the suffering and death of Jesus...by suffering the social indignities of loving the unloveable...forgiving the unforgivable...being true when it is more convenient to live a lie...using our bodies and our attention and our appetites and our minds in ways that we can boldly and humbly and unashamedly account for...when we see Jesus again, the judge of the living and the dead.

To be sure, Holy Saturday spirituality is like all of life: *living* in between life...and life.

It is living like how the old church mothers used to say. "*This is our dressing up room.*" And when we cross more fully into eternal life...and its feast, it is in *this* life that we get dressed and prepare for it.

Again, as 1 Peter says, "Maintain constant love for one another. Love covers a multitude of sins."

To *live* in this way, to respond to one another in love, demands our *best* efforts, *energized* by Holy Ghost fire. It is to rest in the promise that all of the troubles of this world do not compare to the *glory* of the life to come, the life that we *already have* by virtue of our faith in the Risen One.

No matter what Holy Saturday feels like this year, *know* that the promise of God is that: even in *death*, there is life,

even in *tragedy* there is hope,
even in *judgment* there is mercy,
even in the *absence* of those who have gone before, we have their memories and their stories.

That even a *Holy* Saturday must give way to an *Easter* Sunday.

So then let us work...and watch...and wail...and wait...in Holy Saturday's *sure* and *certain* hope.