

Dimitris Nikiforos
Sermon on Holy Friday Evening [Matins of Holy Saturday]
Friday, April 6th, 2018

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen!

Today Christ's body has been taken down from the cross, received into the hands of His mother and friends.

They have wrapped His body in their love and laid Him in the tomb.

The women sit opposite the tomb.

They do nothing.

They say nothing.

They just sit.

A great stone has been placed over the door of the tomb.

The tomb is now sealed, guarded, protected.

"When one door closes another opens," goes an old and popular saying.

But what about that time in between?

The time after one door closes but before another opens?

What do we do then?

As a friend of mine once said, "It's hell when you are waiting in the hallway."

That's where we are today.

The door on Holy Friday has closed.

Jesus is dead.

The door on Pascha has not yet opened.

The tomb is sealed and guarded.

This is Holy Saturday.

The in-between time.

The tomb time.

It is tempting on Holy Saturday to run away, to leave the tomb and just get to Pascha.

Holy Saturday, however, is not only a day on the liturgical calendar.

It is also a reality experienced in each of our lives.

On the calendar Holy Saturday is the next day, the day after Holy Friday.

In life Holy Saturday is also the next day, the day after.

The day after the funeral.

The day after the body has been buried.

The day after we tried and failed.

The day after the relationship ended.

The day after the dream was shattered.

The day after the tragedy.

Holy Saturday is the day after.

We all come to the Holy Saturday of our life, the hell of our life.

And it always involves a death of some kind:

the death of a beloved one,

the death of a relationship

the death of a dream.

Regardless of how it comes about, someone or something has died and all the doors remain closed.

We are "brought into darkness without any light."

We are walled in and cannot escape.

There is nothing but the tomb.

Is the tomb the end?

Is there life after Holy Saturday?

Today we want to know what's next or if there will even be a next.

We want to know if there is life after this loss.

Our portion, our share, we are told is in the Lord.

His steadfast love.

His never ending mercies.

His great faithfulness.

Where is that today?

Where is the steadfast love of the Lord on Holy Saturday?

Where are His never ending mercies and great faithfulness on the morning after?

Where is our Lord today?

In the only place He could be;

Into the abyss of death with Adam and Eve.

In hell with you and me.

That's where the Lord's steadfast love is on Holy Saturday.

That's where the Lord's great faithfulness is on the morning after.

That's where His never ending mercies are today.

Today Christ descends into the dead parts of our life, into the hell of our life, breaking the bonds of death, and setting the captives free.

Today death trembles in fear.

Today Hades cries out groaning:

"I should not have accepted the Man born of Mary.

He came and destroyed my power.

He shattered the gates of brass.

As God, He raised the souls I had held captive."

We are never abandoned on the Holy Saturday of our life.

And if it feels like our life has been shaken to the core on Holy Saturday, it's actually the gates of hell being torn down.

It is hell itself shaking with fear at the presence of Christ, trembling and regretting that it ever presumed to take captive the Author of Life or one of His children.

This is Christ's harrowing of hell.

Tragedy, sorrow, and death do not simply go away or get replaced today.

They are transformed by Christ in His tomb.

The birthplace of our Pascha.

The workshop of our resurrection.

In this holy workshop Christ transforms tragedy into triumph, sorrow into joy, and death into life.

At the presence of Christ, the trembling and quaking of Hades become the contractions that birth new life.

The tomb of Holy Saturday becomes the womb of Holy Pascha.

This is Christ's promise hidden deep within every tomb.

And today we gladly receive this promise.

We remain present to the tomb of Holy Saturday.

As Mary Magdalene and the other Mary are "sitting opposite the tomb."

We, too sit and wait with Christ's promise,

trusting that there is more going on than what we see or understand,

crying out to the One who always keeps His promises:

"Arise o God, judge the earth, for to Thee belong all the nations."

Amen!