

Holy Saturday

SAINT OF THE DAY

08_04_2023



Holy Saturday is called an aliturgical day because the Church does not celebrate the Eucharist. The faithful are called to relive in silence and meditate on the mystery of Christ in the tomb and on His descent into hell, in soul and divinity, to proclaim salvation to the just. While awaiting the Easter Vigil, which liturgically is a celebration proper to Easter Sunday (to be held after sunset on Holy Saturday and by dawn on the new day), all the churches, left in darkness after the evening Mass on Holy Thursday, continue to be in darkness, symbolising the lack of the light of Christ who will return to reveal

himself in all His glory with the Resurrection.

The mystical wait for the Bridegroom, crucified in atonement for our sins, explains why Holy Saturday is the only day on which one cannot receive the Eucharist (neither in the Ambrosian Rite nor in the Roman Rite), with the exception of the viaticum for the seriously ill.

The event of Christ in the tomb is linked first of all to the piety shown by Joseph of Arimathea, venerated as a saint, who on Friday evening went to Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus so that he could give Him a fitting burial before the Sabbath, with its prescription of rest. The evangelists report on the sheet in which Joseph, followed to the tomb by the pious women, wrapped the dead Christ (John adds that he was accompanied by Nicodemus, who brought the aromatic oils for the burial, “a mixture of myrrh and aloe weighing about one hundred pounds”). Here we can briefly recall that the Gospel account of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus is completely compatible with the figure impressed on the Holy Shroud kept in the Cathedral of Turin.

Holy Saturday offers the opportunity to think about the ordeal experienced by all the apostles and the friends of Jesus. They, because of His miracles and his Word, had truly believed that Jesus was the Saviour announced by the prophets; and yet they were disoriented in the face of His death. They were bewildered by His death, which took place amidst the terrible sufferings and the ignominy of the cross: they could not understand why He, true God and true man, had not avoided it, but instead went to meet it as He had announced. They would understand the reason at his Resurrection, embracing in their lives the Divine Will following the example of Mary Most Holy who more than any other suffered for her Son's cross. She had freely accepted that immense pain, necessary in the salvific plan and premise for glorification.

As we profess in the Apostles' Creed, Christ died and descended into hell. But what does this mean exactly? Together with the various biblical passages - such as Psalm 16, in which David blesses the Lord, “For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell”, also quoted in Peter's address (cf. Acts 2:31) - the Catechism comes to our aid: “Jesus knew death like all men and reached them with His soul in the abode of the dead. But he descended there as Saviour, proclaiming the Good News to the spirits who were prisoners there”, that is, to the righteous: “Jesus did not descend into hell to free the damned, nor to destroy the hell of damnation, but to free the righteous who had gone before him”. To whom He announced His victory over death.

Read more:

[Sections 631-637](#) of the Catechism, on the meaning of Jesus' descent into hell.