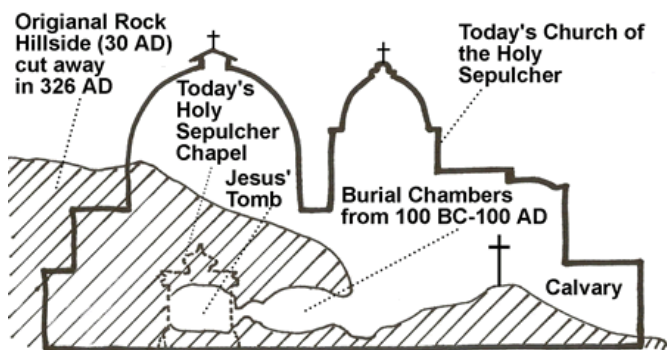


HOLY SATURDAY: 11th APRIL



Map showing the site of Calvary and the Garden Tomb within the present Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem

The rock where the crucifixion took place was situated in a disused quarry outside Jerusalem. This rock still survives and can be seen at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. In the rock there are some enormous cracks and splits. They have traditionally believed to have been caused by the earthquake, which St Matthew describes as having happened after the moment of Christ's death.

⁵¹ And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom; and the earth shook, and the rocks were split; ⁵² the tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, ⁵³ and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. ⁵⁴ When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe, and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

This is an important passage, because it explains what was going on between the moment of Christ's death and the Easter Day resurrection. In the creed we say that Christ descended into the place of the dead where he brought the love of God and the promise of eternal life with God. Traditionally this is called the Harrowing of Hell. Hell is separation from God and through entering the realm of death Christ ended that separation. St Matthew describes how the spirits of those trapped in death were free. Elsewhere St Peter, the leading apostle, writes of

how Our Lord 'went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits.' (1 Peter 3:19-20) In a poetic passage St Paul (Philippians 2:9-10) speaks of how God's rule is now everywhere: "God exalted Him and gave to Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bend, of those in heaven, and on the earth, and *under the earth*" (Emphasis added).



The above picture (an ikon from the Eastern Church) is an attempt to illustrate this. The darkness at the bottom stands for separation from God in death. The two pieces of wood Christ is standing on are actually the gates of death. They have now been broken open by Christ, so nobody need be trapped. The gates are now in the shape of a cross to show that it is through the cross we are saved. Christ is also grasping a man and a woman by the hand, as He quite literally pulls them up into the resurrection life. These figures are Adam and Eve who stand for all people.



Another illustration (above) by Fra Angelico shows how Christ has opened the door of the cavern of

death to let in the light of the resurrection; everyone heads towards the door. Here Jesus Christ is truly shown to be 'the way, the truth and the life.'

Tomorrow we look forward with joy to celebrating the empty tomb and the risen Christ; a wonderful public sign that death is defeated and we too look forward to sharing in the life of the resurrection. Finally may I return to the wonderful words of St Paul in his Epistle to the Romans (8:35, 38-39), where he says that nothing can separate us from the Love of God.

Then what can separate us from the love of Christ? Can affliction or hardship? Can persecution, hunger, nakedness, peril or the sword? For I am convinced that there is nothing in death or life, in the realm of the spirits or superhuman powers, in the world as it is or the world as it shall be, in the forces of the universe, in heights or depths - nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Fr Michael

PRAYERS FOR THE DAY

Silence and stillness reigns today. Let us reflect on Christ's descent to the abode of the dead, there declaring that the final death has been conquered once-and-for-all and nowhere is beyond the remit of God's love. We commend into God's hands all those we have loved, but see no longer and those who have died in the present pandemic.

Christ through entering into the place of the dead preached hope to the hopeless and life those who had none. We pray for the gift of hope in our lives; a gift a whole world is so in need of.

We pray for those who among us who put their trust in false gods such as money, possessions and power.

May we learn to rejoice in being your precious sons and daughters; children made in your image to reflect your loving nature.

Let us pray for our family members, friends, neighbours, co-workers, and even those who are known to God but merely cross our path.

God of life, we look forward with hope to the resurrection when all things will be renewed; may we renew the face of the earth.



Tomorrow we rejoice that no stone can imprison you and live in the hope that no rock cannot be rolled away or split through your grace. Amen.