

Holy Saturday

The 'time between'

This prayer time is presented in written form, so you can spend as much or as little time as you would like, reflecting on the words of scripture and the approaching time of the Lord's resurrection.

It is probably more appropriate to use this time of prayer and reflection in the evening or at night – sometime near to or after sunset on Holy Saturday.

Time to wonder...

As the sun goes down and the darkness approaches, we remember the darkness that covers our world. The hunger of those without food. The isolation of those who live without love. The cold and fear of those who live without a home. The pain of those who are sick. The devastation of those who are bereaved. The worry of the poor and needy. The anguish of the refugee and asylum seeker. The imbalance between rich and poor. The rejection many experience each day. The addiction that ensnares many. The judgements often made. The misuse of power and the media. The focus on material riches. Spiritual poverty. Emptiness.

The reality that life for us as humans is not quite as it should be. The darkness and the nothingness we encounter on Holy Saturday, especially Holy Saturday night, reminds us that the darkness of sin is very real. That sin is far bigger than a set of rules or moral code. It is something very real. It is more than we can deal with alone.

For the first disciples, Holy Saturday was a 'time between' – it was a time of waiting. The shock and horror of the crucifixion was still real to them. The fear, the questions and the doubts it brought. The grief and the guilt. They had failed. Some ran away. One denied. One betrayed. Others were helpless. Most hid. But now, in the 'time between', they had the opportunity to think of all that Jesus had said and done. They had time to think of the washing of feet, the bread and wine, the prayers of agony.

Tonight, we are invited to reflect and to think. What does Jesus really mean to me? What do I think about the things he said and did? How do I make sense of Jesus and my life today? Where is Jesus in my life? Where is Jesus in the suffering and fear we see currently? What other questions come to mind in this 'time between'?

Time to reflect

Take time to think and reflect, allow questions, thoughts and feelings come to your mind. Accept them, allow yourself to be you, with all your questions, doubts and fears, in the presence of God.

Prayer

Be present with me, good Lord,
in the darkness of this time of waiting,
be with me as I look to the coming of the light,
let that light come into my life.
Be with me, as I hold before you
the darkness of my sin and my brokenness.
Hold me, as I acknowledge my doubts and fears.
Strengthen my faith and hope. Amen.

Bible Reading

Genesis 1:1 – 2:2

¹ In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ² the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. ³ Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. ⁴ And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

⁶ And God said, 'Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.' ⁷ So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. ⁸ God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

⁹ And God said, 'Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.' And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. ¹¹ Then God said, 'Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.' And it was so. ¹² The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. ¹³ And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

¹⁴ And God said, 'Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.' And it was so. ¹⁶ God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. ¹⁷ God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, ¹⁸ to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

²⁰ And God said, 'Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.' ²¹ So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. ²² God blessed them, saying, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.' ²³ And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

²⁴ And God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.' And it was so. ²⁵ God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶ Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'

²⁷ So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.' ²⁹ God said, 'See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. ³⁰ And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.' And it was so. ³¹ God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

2 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. ² And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done.

Time to wonder....

I think I know this story. It's easy for me to say, 'Of course God didn't create the world in six days.' It's easy because our scientific way of thinking and the evidence from research and history tells us it cannot be true. We know it's ok to say it didn't happen like this because we know there have been dinosaurs on the earth – but they are not in the Bible. There's so much evidence to say the world and universe have been created over millions of years, not just six days!

So, what does it mean? Why is this text here at the beginning of scripture? I know so many people who say, 'The Bible can't be true because it starts with a story which is obviously untrue!' If I am going to make sense of anything in this 'time between', I really need to get my head around this creation story. After all, if God didn't create the world in six days, should I call him the 'Creator'? And if I take away one title and claim made about God.....what happens to all the rest?

Ok. So, I'm happy with the big bang and all that. I feel quite comfortable with evolution and the fact that this planet of ours is just like a speck of dust within the whole universe. So, what does that say about God? Perhaps there are lots of other planets where God is known and loved? Perhaps they all have their own story.....but that's just conjecture. It doesn't really help.

What do I know? Well I know our world is beautiful, amazing, powerful, fragile. I know that spirits lift when we immerse ourselves in nature. Even non-believers tell you there is nothing better than nature to help you feel mentally and physically better, stronger, more positive, more alive. There are many people who say they have had wonderful 'spiritual moments' through nature – at the top of a mountain, a beautiful sunrise/sunset, walking in the midst of vibrant colours and smells from flowers, plants, animals, touching earth, standing on a seashore or by a lake. Reflections. Sounds. Every sense engaged.

Perhaps all that Genesis is saying is that we can feel closest to God when we are in his world. That this world, however it came into being, and why ever it came about, is here as a gift. A gift to all humans, all animals, all plants. A gift to all that lives. And when we are close to that world, the more harmonious we become, and then we feel closer to God. Perhaps the writer of this passage is simply saying – look around you, free your senses, your mind, your heart, your spirit – and you will truly know that you are held in the hand of the Almighty, you are loved more than anything.....how do you know, because all if this is for you, for me, for everyone, for everything. Look, feel, smell, listen and be thankful.

And the darkness begins to fade.....

Time to reflect

Take time to think and reflect, allow questions, thoughts and feelings come to your mind. Accept them, allow yourself to be you, with all your questions, doubts and fears, in the presence of God.

Prayer

Lord, you have created all things,
you have placed us in this beautiful world
and this amazing and awesome universe.
Help us to feel close to you
and to know you a little better,
through the glories of nature. **Amen.**

Bible Reading

Genesis 22:1-18

After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' ² He said, 'Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt-offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you.' ³ So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt-offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him. ⁴ On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away. ⁵ Then Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you.' ⁶ Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So, the two of them walked on together. ⁷ Isaac said to his father Abraham, 'Father!' And he said, 'Here I am, my son.' He said, 'The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?' ⁸ Abraham said, 'God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son.' So, the two of them walked on together.

⁹ When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' ¹² He said, 'Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.' ¹³ And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ So Abraham called that place 'The LORD will provide'; as it is said to this day, 'On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.'

¹⁵ The angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, ¹⁶ and said, 'By myself I have sworn, says the LORD: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, ¹⁸ and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.'

Time to wonder....

What an incredible story! The faith of Abraham was so strong. But what does this say about God? How would I react if I felt God was asking me to sacrifice someone I loved? Do I really believe in a God that would ask me to kill someone, or something, just to prove my faith in him? Does God really need to exert such power and control over us? And if he does, why does the Almighty, All-powerful God need to do that?

But maybe this story is not about what God wants or needs but is more about what we frail human beings need. Let's just ponder for a moment on Abraham and Sarah.

Abraham is commanded by God to depart from the house of his father Terah. God tells Abraham to depart his homeland for a land that he would show him, ensuring to "make of him a great nation, bless him, make his name great, bless those who blessed him, and curse "him" that curses him." Obeying God's call, Abraham brought his wife Sarah, his nephew Lot, and the wealth that they had acquired, and travelled to Canaan.

Because there was a harsh famine in the land of Canaan, Abraham and Sarah travelled south to Egypt. On the journey to Egypt, Abram told Sarah to name herself as his sister, worrying that the Egyptians would kill him in order to take his wife, declaring, "I know what a beautiful woman you are. When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'this is his wife.' Then they will kill me but will let you live. Say you are my sister so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you." (Genesis 12:11-13)

When summoned before Pharaoh, Sarah stated that Abraham was her brother, and the king gave them gifts thinking he was a sibling of the beautiful Sarah. It is probable that Sarah received her Egyptian servant Hagar during this stay. However, when God afflicted Pharaoh's family with plagues Pharaoh then realized that Sarah was Abraham's wife and commanded that they leave Egypt.

Ten years after returning to Canaan, Abraham and Sarah were still childless. Sarah suggested that Abraham have a child with her Egyptian handmaid Hagar, to which he agreed. This produced stress

between Sarah and Hagar, as Sarah protested to her husband that the handmaid no longer regarded her as an authority. Hagar fled from her mistress but returned after angels came to her. She then gave birth to Abraham's son Ishmael.

When Abraham was ninety-nine years old, God declared his name: "Abraham" – "a father of many nations" and gave him the covenant of circumcision. Abraham was given certainty that Sarah would have a son. Shortly afterward, Abraham and Sarah were visited by three men. One of the guests told Abraham that upon his arrival next year, Sarah would have a son. While at the tent entrance, Sarah heard what was said, and she laughed to herself about the possibility of having a child at their ages. Sarah soon became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham, at the very moment which had been predicted. Abraham, then a hundred years old, named the child "Isaac." Isaac would go on to become a crucial character in God's plan, fathering Jacob the eventual Patriarch of the Israelites.

In the story of Abraham, and in this passage, perhaps we are reminded that God fulfils his promises in his time and not in ours. That we are always called to be faithful and trusting. There will be times we get it wrong and make decisions that are not in accordance with God's will, but he will always forgive and restore us.

What was promised to Abraham seemed completely impossible. How could he be the father of so many at such a late stage in his life. Yet now Abraham is believed to be the father in faith for Jews, Christians and Muslims – so he is the father of many nations. Wow! That is truly mind blowing. Here we see that God is faithful to his promises. He brings out all that we plan and intend, but always in his time and according to his wishes.

Here I ask the Lord to strengthen my faith, to help me to remain strong, even when everything around seems to be saying 'this will never happen.' Help me to know afresh this Easter that God is faithful to his promises. He will take care of all people and all things.

And the darkness begins to fade.....

Time to reflect

Take time to think and reflect, allow questions, thoughts and feelings come to your mind. Accept them, allow yourself to be you, with all your questions, doubts and fears, in the presence of God.

Prayer

Father, thank you for being the God of all who believe in you.
You promised Abraham that he would become
the father of all nations,
thank you that through Jesus, you fulfil that promise.
Help me to be strong in faith and hope
through the resurrection of your Son. Amen.

Bible Reading

Exodus 14:15-31

¹⁵ Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to go forward. ¹⁶ But you lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the Israelites may go into the sea on dry ground. ¹⁷ Then I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and so, I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army, his chariots, and his chariot drivers. ¹⁸ And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gained glory for myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his chariot drivers.'

¹⁹ The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them. ²⁰ It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel. And so, the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; one did not come near the other all night.

²¹ Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. ²² The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. ²³ The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. ²⁴ At the morning watch the LORD in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army and threw the Egyptian army into panic. ²⁵ He clogged their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty. The Egyptians said, 'Let us flee from the Israelites, for the LORD is fighting for them against Egypt.'

The Pursuers Drowned

²⁶ Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers.' ²⁷ So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the LORD tossed the Egyptians into the sea. ²⁸ The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. ²⁹ But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

³⁰ Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. ³¹ Israel saw the great work that the LORD did against the Egyptians. So, the people feared the LORD and believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.

Time to wonder....

This story and account of crossing the Red Sea is amazing and truly spectacular, but at the same time it is challenging and disturbing.

Imagining the Israelites crossing the Red Sea with the water piled up to the left and right like two huge walls is awesome! Thinking about the people walking along the seabed in faith and hope. Knowing that on one side of the sea they are still slaves and at the mercy of Pharaoh, but on the other side they are truly free is again encouraging and uplifting. It fits so neatly with our understanding of Baptism: before we enter the waters of baptism we remain at the mercy of sin and its consequences. Once we have been emerged in the waters of baptism, we enjoy the freedom which Christ brings, we are no longer slaves to sin and are freed from its consequences.

But I cannot get past this story without thinking of Pharaoh's army, all those soldiers doing as they were commanded. Following orders and trying to bring the Hebrews slaves back to Egypt. Many of them would have lived all their lives believing the Hebrews were the property of Egypt and that Pharaoh was doing what was right. They paid for this determination and the unbending will of Pharaoh with their lives. How can that be just, or right? Where is God in all of this?

On this Holy Saturday, this difficult story with all its challenges reminds us that freedom comes at a cost. Being freed from sin comes at a huge cost, one that God takes to himself through the suffering and death of Jesus.

Today, I think of those across the world who bear the suffering and pain we see in this story and event. I think of those who are held and slaves at this time. For those who are caught up in people trafficking, for all who are forced to work as slaves, those who are treated as slaves and all who are caught up in jobs and roles where their freedom is taken away or limited. I think especially of the caught up in the sex industry. Those who work on Cocoa farms where they are little more than slaves. For those children and adults who are forced to work in factories producing carpets, cheap clothes. For those who are forced to

work on farms producing sugar, coffee, tea, palm and nut oil.....and so many more, so we can enjoy low cost food.

Lord, help me to take my part in trying to walk with you, just as the Hebrews did. Help me to be strong and to trust you to guide and strengthen me. Give me the courage to stand firm. Help me also to do all that I can to 'make a difference' by the decisions I make and to do all I can to bring an end to enslavement and the misuse of your people, wherever and whoever they are.

And the darkness begins to fade.....

Time to reflect

Take time to think and reflect, allow questions, thoughts and feelings come to your mind. Accept them, allow yourself to be you, with all your questions, doubts and fears, in the presence of God.

Prayer

Lord, you shed light on the miracles you worked in ancient times.
The Red Sea is a symbol of our baptism,
a sign that you bring freedom to all those who trust in you.
Help more people to come to know and love you, this Eastertime.
Give me the courage to encourage and enable
everyone to life freely as your children. Amen.

Bible Reading

Isaiah 55:1-11

Listen, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and you that have no money,
come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.

² Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labour for that which does not satisfy?

Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.

³ Incline your ear, and come to me;
listen, so that you may live.

I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David.

⁴ See, I made him a witness to the peoples,
a leader and commander for the peoples.

⁵ See, you shall call nations that you do not know,
and nations that do not know you shall run to you,
because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel,
for he has glorified you.

⁶ Seek the LORD while he may be found,
call upon him while he is near;

⁷ let the wicked forsake their way,
and the unrighteous their thoughts;
let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.

⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

¹⁰ For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,

¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

Time to wonder....

I am humbled and blown away each time I read this passage. In these words, Lord, your prophet tells us afresh that you give us all we need. You invite us every day to come to you. To take all that we need from you. You also remind us that we spend so much time and energy, planning what we think is important and will satisfy.....the best food and drink, the latest fashions, the holidays we need, the jobs to be done around the house, that new car.....the list goes on. But you remind us here that none of these really satisfy.

You draw us to that truth that only by listening to you will our souls live. Only in and with you will truly thrive and find lasting happiness, both in this world and in the next. You remind us that you have invited and drawn us into a living relationship with you. But you also make clear that the life we are called to live with you will be different from a life which is focused on the world and its ways. This must be true because your ways are not our ways, your ways are above ours. If we listen to you and follow your ways, then your world will be like the times when rain that comes down, it will nourish and feed, then it will accomplish what it was sent out to do.

This passage is uplifting and encouraging, but it is also challenging. To walk with God, to be a follower of Christ, to be one of his disciples means daily dying to that which is earth bound and world focused and being renewed and strengthened in those ways which are not easy or natural.

Today, in this 'time between' we can focus on how we are living as disciples of the Lord Jesus. Do I give enough time to him each day? Do I have a daily routine in which I read the scriptures? Do I allow what I have read to speak to me? Do I try to use some notes or guide to help me better understand the scripture and what it might be saying? Do I spend enough time each day in prayer.....not just speaking to God and telling him things, but do I give time for God to speak to me? Would those around me know that I am a Christian, a disciple of Jesus by the things I say and do? What difference does being a Christian make in my life? How do I share the 'good news' of Jesus each day with others?

And the darkness begins to fade.....

Time to reflect

Take time to think and reflect, allow questions, thoughts and feelings come to your mind. Accept them, allow yourself to be you, with all your questions, doubts and fears, in the presence of God.

Prayer

Lord, tonight we see again that you are the only hope of the world.
We face greater challenges that we can master alone.
Since the beginning of time, you have been calling people,
calling them to listen to you and your ways,
inviting them to walk with you.
This is what we are celebrating today.
Help me, and all those who want to walk your way,
to be faithful and to grow in goodness and love. Amen.

Bible Reading

Romans 6:3-11

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For whoever has died is freed from sin. ⁸ But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. ¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Time to wonder....

I wonder what you might say if you were asked: What is your favourite Bible reading or passage? I have to say that I find myself finding different passages to answer this question, but the one text which I constantly return to is John 10:¹⁰⁻¹¹, which says: *'I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.'* This seems to be the text I return to as I ponder the mystery of Easter and the questions it brings each year. Why did Jesus have to die on a cross? Could sin not be defeated another way? Is it really true?

This part of St Paul's Letter to the Romans sees Paul expressing beautifully the central tenants of our faith. Jesus endured all in his Passion and Death and was raised to new and everlasting life for us and for all humanity. By his offering of himself, humanity was changed for ever!

This part of St Paul's letter reminds us that when we celebrate the mysteries of our faith, when we read about all that God has done in the scriptures, we are not reading and looking back with interest, we become part of those events by the power of the Holy Spirit. So, when St Paul says that we have been 'baptized into Christ' and through this we have been 'baptized into his death' this 'time between' day gives to opportunity to reflect on that a little more. When water was poured over us in our baptism, we became part of the Exodus story – for through the events of this Holy Night, we are taken from slavery in sin, to freedom in Christ. On one side of the waters of the font we were bound by earthly things, just as the Hebrews were bound to Pharaoh, on the other side, we are united to heavenly things and are free to live life in the Spirit. Likewise, when we say that we have been crucified with Christ, it means that all that prevents us from truly being the person God calls us to be, has been taken away from us. By this mystery and miracle, we have become like Abraham and Sarah, we have entered a new and everlasting relationship with God. Like them, God promises to fulfil his plans and purpose through us and for us. We are encouraged and empowered to be children of faith, just like our parents in faith, Abraham and Sarah.

All of this is reflected in those powerful words from St Paul, 'if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall live with him' and 'death no longer has dominion over us,' and that means we are 'alive to God in Christ Jesus.' This is what the Good News of Jesus really means. It is not just about looking to some future promise that says we will be given life in the kingdom of heaven, it means we will be given life in all its fullness in this world, and in the next.

So again, that favourite phrase from scripture: *'I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep'* tells us that when we truly celebrate the great feast and meaning of Easter, we celebrate the light and power of the resurrection breaking into the world. We rejoice as that Easter power is felt across the world. When we as Christians see that the light and power of the resurrection is not felt and known by all, that it is somehow being diminished by the way people and the world are treated, then we must speak out and act as Christ calls us to. We rejoice in knowing that all the powers of darkness have now been defeated by Christ's resurrection. So wherever darkness tries to make its presence felt, we are called to do all that we can to challenge and banish it. This is what it means to live in the light of the resurrection: when we are doing all that we can to enable our Lord to ensure all his children, whoever they are, *have life and have it abundantly.* For he is the Good Shepherd, and it was for everyone that he laid down his life.

Lord, as we await the resurrection of your Son, our Saviour, help me to better understand the Good News of the Gospel. Help me to appreciate more clearly how I am bound with your Son, his passion,

death and resurrection through my own baptism. Help me to be strong in my faith, in my hope and in my ability to share that Good News with all those I meet.

And the darkness begins to fade.....

Time to reflect

Take time to think and reflect, allow questions, thoughts and feelings come to your mind. Accept them, allow yourself to be you, with all your questions, doubts and fears, in the presence of God.

Prayer

Lord of unchanging power and light,
look with mercy and love on all your people.
Through the mystery of Easter
help all to see
the fallen raised up,
the old made new,
hope and justice in every land,
peace and unity in every place,
all things brought to perfection,
through him who is our origin and salvation,
Jesus Christ, you Son. Amen.

Bible Reading

Luke 24:¹⁻¹²

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. ² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they went in, they did not find the body. ⁴ While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. ⁵ The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here but has risen. ⁶ Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷ that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.' ⁸ Then they remembered his words, ⁹ and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰ Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹ But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. ¹² But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

Time to wonder....

Each of the Gospels contains the news that on the first Sunday after the crucifixion and burial of Jesus, he rose from the dead. This is the heart of the Gospel, everything about our faith and all that we claim to be true as Christians rests on this event. St Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:¹⁴ says clearly: 'if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain.' We could say that if Christ was not raised from the dead on that first Easter Day, our faith has nothing to offer and is based on a lie.

It's interesting that none of the Gospels describe the resurrection, what we have are accounts about events which happened soon after the death of Jesus through which his disciples came to believe that he was alive and not dead. They were clear that Jesus had not been resuscitated or 'healed' he was a live with a new resurrection life!

There are lots of similarities in each of the Gospel accounts, there are also some inconsistencies. For some, these are a weakness in the claim, but for others they add strength because eyewitnesses seldom agree on every aspect of an event. If eyewitnesses do agree harmoniously, then people sometimes become suspicious that what they say may have been planned and fabricated. Some small inconsistencies seem to add weight that people are speaking openly from their own experience and memory. All the Gospel accounts clearly show there are two main elements to prove the claim that Jesus had been raised to life. Firstly, the tomb was empty. Secondly, Jesus appeared to his disciples over six weeks in different ways. The disciples enjoyed a wide range of experiences with the risen Lord; sometimes in small numbers and others with larger crowds. Another compelling piece of evidence for us all these centuries later is that most of the disciples were executed for the claim they made about Jesus rising from the dead. You must be convinced that something has happened to die for it.

As we read these accounts and enter the mystery of Easter once again. As we find ourselves in this 'time between', we are invited once again to ask ourselves what we believe about Jesus. Like Mary Magdalene, we are invited to look for the Lord. To seek him in our hearts and souls, to discover afresh whether we recognise him, as Mary Magdalene did. Like her, we wait in our prayer time for him to speak our name and to call us to believe in him and to trust him. Like Peter and John, we are called to run spiritually to the tomb, to see through the eyes of faith the reality of the empty tomb. We are invited in our hearts to gaze, like those first disciples, into the space where his body had been laid. To see that he is no longer there. Are we, like John able 'see and believe'? Or do we need a little more convincing. Are we more likely to need to read more and to think more, to talk about our faith and what it means – just as the disciples on the Road to Emmaus did. Do we need to see Christ through the eyes of faith, when we read the scriptures, when we hear God speak to us in our hearts and minds. Do we truly see the risen and living Christ, as we break bread together in the Eucharist? Or are we more like Thomas? Do we need more concrete evidence of the resurrection? If so, then perhaps we need to open our eyes and see God at work in our midst. We need to ask God to help us to see the living Christ through the goodness, love and commitment of others. In the lives of those who willingly put themselves at risk for others. In those that seek to make our world a better place for all. In the works of charity and the many good deeds done by one person for another. We need also to look into the eyes of those whose lives have been utterly transformed by the living Christ at work in them.....in so many, many people and places.

However we approach Easter, and whatever ways we seek to discover the truth of the risen Christ, when we are able to say to Jesus, with Thomas and all the other apostles and saints, 'You are my Lord and my God' then we open our hearts to welcome him. Then as our living Lord he will accept our invitation and enter our heart and soul. This is the moment we are filled with Easter light and joy. It is then we discover that Easter Day is the start of a journey into resurrection faith, and this is something to be enjoyed and shared. It is a glorious and amazing beginning, and it is also quite tentative and confused. But we do not need to be afraid for the risen Christ goes ahead of us, no matter where we go. Then we realise, we are no long in the 'time between' for we have become an Easter people, and alleluia is our song.

And then the darkness is no more.....

Time to reflect

Take time to think and reflect, allow questions, thoughts and feelings come to your mind. Accept them, allow yourself to be you, with all your questions, doubts and fears, in the presence of God.

Prayer

Lord, you brighten this dark night
with the radiance of the risen Christ.
When I come to discover again
the mystery of his resurrection
and the life he brings to all,
help me to be renewed in mind, body and spirit,
that I may serve you faithfully
as your disciple, sister/brother and friend.
Help me always to walk in your light. Amen.