**Fr Robin has provided us with a reflection for Holy Saturday. He writes;**

The last time I had a house with a garden, the garden had been neglected for some years and was badly overgrown. I could just about keep the back lawn in reasonable shape, but at the edge of the grass, where there might have been shrubs and flower-beds, the soil had become so clogged and thick and heavy that I could do nothing with it. Someone suggested that I needed a rotavator. I had no idea what this was (I am not much of a gardener!), but when my father came to stay we did get hold of one, and after much time work we got the soil back into some sort of condition and were able to grow a few things.

The rotavator operates in much the same a *harrow,*an agricultural implement with a set of sharp prongs which can be drawn over heavy soil, to break it up and allow air to enter so that it can then be ploughed, and crops sown.

There is an ancient tradition called *The Harrowing of Hell*. During the time his body rested in the grave Jesus was not inactive. His spirit descended into hell (we say that in the Apostles' Creed), the realm of the dead, in order to bring them back to life - for all the generations of humankind from Adam onwards are to be open to God's renewing love; nobody can be excluded.

The dead have been so long in the underworld that they have become clogged and heavy like my soil. They need to be broken up by the harrowing action of God's love in Jesus, so that air and light can get at them and they can come back to life. We can indeed become so used to a condition of inertness and lifelessness that we need to be dragged out of it, kicking and screaming as it were. A great spiritual guide, John Main, said that it is almost as if we are more afraid of resurrection than we are of dying; Jesus still has to work hard even in the grave!

The Office of Readings for Holy Saturday in the Liturgy of the Hours includes an early homily which imagines Jesus going down to the underworld, talking to Adam and telling him of everything he has endured, so that Adam and all creation may be raised to new life. Jesus says:

*'But arise let us go hence. The enemy brought you out of the land of paradise. I will reinstate you, no longer in paradise, but on the throne of heaven. I denied you the tree of life, which was a figure, but now I myself am united to you, I who am life. I posted the cherubim to guard you as they would slaves, now I make the cherubim worship you as they would God.*

*'The cherubim throne has been prepared, the bearers are ready and waiting, the bridal chamber is in order, the food is provided, the everlasting houses and rooms are in readiness, the treasures of good things have been opened; the kingdom of heaven has been prepared before the ages.'*

Holy Saturday can seem like an in-between, nothing much sort of day. We have shouted our hosannas with the crowd to greet Jesus on his triumphal entry into the holy city. We have been with Jesus in the upper room keeping the Last Supper, receiving his body and blood. We have seen him suffer and die on the cross and his body laid in the tomb. The immense drama of Holy Week is complete, now we can only wait, but the harrowing of hell tells us that in secret mysterious ways God is always at work preparing us for the new life he wants us to share in Jesus.

This year more than ever we are being reduced by the Coronavirus crisis whether we want to be or not to a seemingly empty time of waiting, but we know that even now there are many signs of new life to come: in the heroism and self-sacrifice of medical staff, in the continuing work of supermarkets and services to provide the things we need, in the care and concern neighbours are showing to each other. Lockdown could so easily lead to a breakdown in social order, but most people are adapting and finding creative ways to keep going while they wait for the crisis to pass.

It is not easy and feels uncomfortable, as uncomfortable as Jesus' harrowing of the dead in the underworld, but it is possible and can be endured. After all, just think what it will be like when the crisis is over and life gets back to normal, what an explosion of delight there will be!

Our lives, our feelings and circumstances do not always fit neatly with the calendar of the Church. On Good Friday we may be on top of the world, at Christmas or Easter down in the depths. We cannot turn on sorrow or delight like a tap. The homily I mentioned says of Holy Saturday, *“Today there is a great silence over the earth, a great silence and stillness.”* This year we may have to go through a prolonged Holy Saturday of many days as we wait in stillness: our Easter will seem strange indeed without the usual celebrations in church and at home. But if we can embrace the stillness and allow it to embrace us, we can look forward in hopeful anticipation to a return to normality, knowing that now too God is always at work to bring us to the enjoyment of his eternal kingdom.

*'The treasures of good things have been opened; the kingdom of heaven has been prepared before the ages.'*

Wishing you in whatever way you can keep it a happy and holy Easter,

Fr. Robin.