



## The Diocese of Southwark

## Croydon Episcopal Area

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Dear Brothers and Sisters

From where I sit at home, I can hear the trains rumbling in and out of East Croydon station. I hear the cars attempting to drive too quickly round Croydon's dual carriageways and watch aeroplanes climbing and descending overhead. Now - well, it's not exactly silent, but it is quiet. The hyperactive bustle has been replaced with the sounds of essential travel. The birds are no longer having to shout as they sing their territories.

This reflection comes on the quietest day of the Christian year, Holy Saturday. This is the day on which the eucharist is not celebrated, the day when all creation holds its breath, while Jesus sleeps in the tomb. That's the spiritual and liturgical truth every year - but most years, in most churches, it's actually full of people cleaning, preparing Easter liturgies, arranging flowers, printing off orders of service, finishing sermons, rehearsing music - etc., etc. For a day when nothing is supposed to happen, it's terribly busy.

In this very strange Holy Week, as we prepare for an equally unusual Easter, I would like to invite you to join with me in the silence of Holy Saturday as a way into the mystery of God's love which we celebrate at this season.

Holy Saturday is not a continuation of Good Friday, nor is it a prefiguring of Easter Day. It is in-between time, the time of uncertainty and waiting, the time of not knowing what will happen next, bad or good. Jesus has given himself into his Father's hands as he dies on the cross. The ambiguity of 'It is finished' is as yet unresolved - we do not yet know whether it is a cry of failure or of triumph. We do not even have the security of knowing that the worst has happened, still less the certainty of resurrection.

Or at least, that is how it is in the drama of Holy Week. But we read it also from the perspective of Easter. We know that this day of waiting is the prelude to unimaginable joy, to the breaking from the tomb and the beginning of the restoration of all things which is the final consummation of God's purpose, in the new heaven and the new earth.

It is that knowledge, I believe, which enables us - perhaps strangely - still to live with the stillness and not knowing of Holy Saturday. Our resurrection faith gives us the strength to bring hope into the emptiness of this day, without denying its power. Holy Saturday has its place in our spirituality, because it is still part of our human reality. The light of resurrection is the sure hope of a new dawn, but in this world the experience of emptiness and darkness is still real. Those of us given the task of ministry are called to accompany people there and be with them, to walk with them as Jesus brought the good news to the dead (1 Pet 3:19).

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*Holy Saturday is the process of the transformation of the tragedy of human existence: it is the experience of God descending into the depths of that which is lost and hopeless, opening up a way for us through the very powers that would otherwise destroy us.*  
*Dermot Power, 'The Holy Saturday Experience',*  
*The Way 38/1 (1998), 32-39*

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It has felt to me that the whole of this Holy Week has had something of Holy Saturday about it, and that that will continue into Easter. So how do we celebrate Easter this year? Maybe not as noisily as we sometimes do, and certainly not by gathering together. I hope instead that in our own homes we will be able to experience the sheer wonder of the resurrection in a new way. The gospels vary in the exact number who were the first witnesses to the resurrection, but it was not many. Whether on our own (like Mary Magdalene in John's gospel), in twos or threes or family groups, this Easter may be an opportunity to experience again the overturning of all expectation that the resurrection brought. Having gone to a tomb, they found new life. Going in darkness, they were overwhelmed by light.

In that light, then, we bring the good news of resurrection into the current crisis. For those who go to work, saving lives and keeping our essential services going, anxious for themselves or their families, as well as those who stay at home. For those who are sick, and those who pray and wait for them. For those who are sitting in the darkness of bereavement, and especially those who have not been able to say farewell to those who have died.

For our society as a whole, at a time when the superficial comforts of consumerism have been in part stripped away, the resurrection brings the good news that death is defeated, that God's forgiving love is offered to all. The deepest realities of our human existence have forced themselves into the public realm, and require an equally profound answer.

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*I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.*  
*Romans 8:39*

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Thanks be to God!

+ Jonathan Coadon