

Praying on Holy Saturday



**By**

**Marina McCoy**

After the powerful days of Holy Thursday and Good Friday, knowing how to pray on Holy Saturday can feel a bit uncertain. Easter has not yet arrived, and yet the intensity of praying with the Passion has passed. Although surely there are practical things to do in order to get ready for Easter—clothes to press, a meal to prepare—skipping over Holy Saturday never feels quite right to me. At the same time, how to proceed prayerfully can be unclear. Until the Easter Vigil, there is no Mass to attend, although we can pray with the beautiful psalms of Morning Prayer from the Divine Office. It is an in-between time of waiting.

To the extent that we can share this sense of uncertainty over how to pray, we are probably right with the disciples. Jesus' friends had undergone tremendous loss. They were suffering in the aftermath of trauma. At the same time, they had Jesus' words of assurance that the temple of his body would be destroyed and raised up after three days (John 2:19). He told them that for a little while they would not see him, but after a little while longer, they would see him (John 16:16). Jesus gave them the Eucharist to share and the foot washing as a model of service to practice. He did not leave them without hope.

On Holy Saturday, we can imagine what Mary, John, and the others who had stood faithfully at the cross experienced. I often imagine Mary as exhausted and yet comforted. She has just witnessed the torture and death of her son. Yet she also has the other women and John, whom Jesus gave to her as mutual comfort and support. In some paintings of the Crucifixion, Mary faints and John is pictured catching her and holding her so that she does not fall down completely. This gift of Mary to John and John to Mary is often presented as Jesus' gift of his mother to all of us, and rightly so. But there is another dimension. Just as the foot washing models how we are to love through service, Jesus gives us a model of love in times of loss and sorrow. We are to be one another's support, holding, comforting, and encouraging. I imagine that this is what John and Mary did for one another, and for the others, on Holy Saturday.

One way to pray on Holy Saturday, then, is to imagine this time about which Scripture is silent. We can imagine what Mary, John, and the others did. We can imaginatively place ourselves in their midst. Where do we need comfort or encouragement? Or are we the ones who want to offer it to another? The disciples probably had a variety of reactions: perhaps a sense of failure or trauma, wondering what happened, but also perhaps faith, hope, courage, or trust that somehow God would make it better. Where are we in this story, right now, and how do we bring not only our own lives but also the lives of others in our wider communities into this story? We know that Easter is coming. When Easter arrives, what do we hope will be fulfilled?

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*Art: "The Crucifixion, with the Virgin and Saint John the Evangelist Mourning" by Rogier van der Weyden*

