

## WAITING IN THE TOMB (redacted)

Our Apostles' Creed says that after his death, Jesus descended into hell before rising on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day. Theologians have differing ideas what this means but I'm not a theologian, so I will look at this from a spiritual viewpoint. Hell in this sense is not how we usually envision it with red devils and spirits screaming in torture—but hell is the underworld or the place of the dead.

There are 2 kinds of death: terminal death and paschal death. Terminal death ends life and ends possibilities on earth. Paschal death, like terminal death is real, but it is a death that ends one kind of life but opens the person to receive a richer form of life.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus said “Unless a grain of wheat fall to the ground and dies it remains only a kernel, but if it dies it yields a great harvest.” He was not only speaking of his own death but of our dying in life. As an avid gardener, I see this parable lived out every spring when I put those hard nuggets of seed in the ground and life sprouts forth from them. We know they need time in the earth before they can do that; but we can't see what goes on in the darkness.

We have many deaths in our lives and they often feel like hell. We may have suffered the hell of abuse or abandonment as a child which caused our childhood to die an early death. As we grow we have many other deaths—the deaths of loved ones, but also areas of our lives that need to die: expectations of our self and others..... a dream we have held onto for too long and now realize we won't be able to fulfill.....; when our last child leaves home, it can be a dying to a way of life..... millions of cells in our body die on a daily basis.

We can see that if we hold onto these dead areas, there is no room for new life to come in. We become stagnant and often resentful and crusty. Can you imagine if all the old dead cells from our skin just stayed on us, they would just build up layers upon layers of crust?

In one of our Eucharistic acclamations, we say Jesus died upon the cross, Christ arose from the dead; that is, Jesus died in his humanity and rose as the glorious Christ. His disciples didn't recognize him, even though it had only been 3 days since they had seen him. Obviously some sort of change or transformation took place there in the tomb. But what happens between the death and the new life? What leads to the transformation that takes place?

Mostly it seems to be a time of darkness and waiting. For myself, I don't often ask for much in prayer anymore, because over the years I have learned that the answer I usually receive is –WAIT.

We don't like to wait—we are so goal oriented we usually think in terms of goal setting, making a plan and working towards a solution. We always want to be doing something. Some of us may have to sit in traffic every day, often waiting for a jam to clear. I've heard different hints of how to handle these traffic tie ups. Some women use them to put on makeup. I've seen other people reading the paper. I've even heard suggestions to use the time to pray. I don't like that idea however, because then we are not fully attending to the traffic or the prayer. Maybe we could just use the waiting time to wait, to treasure a moment of stillness.

Some things **have to wait**—butterflies and babies for instance. (*And flattening the curve*) Nowadays it seems to me that some young mothers seem to want to ignore

their pregnancies. It's like there is a contest with their friends over who can keep up their hectic schedules or exercise programs the longest. In contrast, some Native American tribes had a special place that a pregnant woman was expected to go—not to ostracize her but it was recognized that there was such a change and transformation going on in her and in her life that she needed time to just BE and reflect.

The Church gives honor and reverence to the time of waiting also. The Church doesn't celebrate any liturgy on Holy Saturday until the late Easter vigil. On Holy Saturday the church recognizes a time of waiting, of silence, of emptiness. There are no flowers or candles; the altar is stripped and bare. This is a rich symbol for us when we face emptiness or death and feel like we have been stripped of all we have held close.

We can use the times of waiting in our lives to cultivate a discipline of silence and inner solitude and learn to wait on God. The empty church of Holy Saturday can give us an example how to do this. First, turn off the exterior noise: TV, radio, cell phones. Second, go to a special place and let others know you are not to be disturbed. Your frequent and consistent use of this spot will make it holy. It can be a tomb-like or womb-like place to wait for transformation to happen.

Like the image of a tomb, silence can frighten us because it brings us face to face with ourselves. It shows us the underside of ourselves and leaves us with only our self for company. Silence is the place of quiet before we hear the voice of God. And in the solitude is where we hear God's voice and are made ready to receive the new life. The time of our waiting in the tomb when we have to let go of something and wait for new life can also be dark and fearful because we don't know the outcome.

In a book called *Stories of Faith* John Shea tells the story of a young man who is tending to his dying father.

The father, still quite young himself, is dying of cancer and is dying hard. The disease is terminal, has wasted his body, and still long after he should already be dead, he lies in a hospital still clinging to life. His body is full of tubes and, despite the best efforts of morphine, he is in constant pain.

Each night after work, his son comes to visit and sits by the bed, holding his father's hand, watching helplessly while he suffers. This goes on for a while. Finally, one night, sitting like this, the son says to the father: "Dad, let go! Trust God, die; anything is better than this." Within a short time, the father grows peaceful and dies and the son realizes that he had just given voice to a very important truth—a truth about letting go and trusting God. Like Jesus, he was finally able to give his spirit over to his Father.<sup>2</sup>

The time of waiting needs trust and hope that we will rise again—that God **will** act. It is a time of letting go which is difficult because we wonder what we will hold onto. It is a time of struggle to break into new life, like butterflies, seeds, birds and babies. All have to struggle to break through their cocoon, or shell, or the crusty earth or the birth canal. If the struggle is rushed, harm, injury or loss of life will result. We will struggle too. But the struggle is necessary to prepare for the new life.

Waiting for a loved one to die, waiting for our pain to heal after a time of grief, waiting for our body to heal after illness or surgery, waiting for a family member to return from war, or the return of a prodigal child. What will the new life bring?

The underworld is not a place in the earth—it is within us in the dark and hidden and painful places we have inside. But Christ has already been there. We are taught that when Christ went into hell he redeemed all humanity stretching back to Adam and Eve and freed the imprisoned spirits and so became Lord over all the demons. We all have places in our own spirits that have been imprisoned by fear or pain or addiction or bad memories. God wants to free us from that and become Lord over our personal demons,

but we have to be willing to trust and be vulnerable to our Lord. Interiority or solitude is the practice of quiet waiting for the fullness of God to take up our emptiness and God lies in wait for us to see the Life that gives meaning to all the little deaths that consume us day by day.<sup>3</sup>

I would like to finish by reading a reflection and then a song. Give handouts, for reflection, and then gather for sharing, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> Rolheiser, R. "The Holy Longing"

<sup>2</sup> quoted in "The Holy Longing"

<sup>3</sup> Chittister, J. "Illuminated Life"

Documents/MaryJo/teachings and retreat talks

### REFLECTIONS ON WAITING IN THE TOMB \*

1. Think about a time in your life when you waited in the tomb (for one phase or event in your life to end and the next to begin):
  - a) What did you learn in the waiting time?
  - b) Did some change or transformation take place in you?
  - c) How did it affect your relationship with God?
  - d) Are you able to see the blessing from the waiting? (Be honest)
2. Reflect on a situation in your life at this time where you are waiting for transformation to take place:
  - a) Have you sought out solitude as a way to **be** during this time?
  - b) How can you use the time of waiting to enter the Paschal Mystery?
  - c) Are you able to let go of your strong control and walk with insecurity for a while?
  - d) Will you trust Christ to raise up the good things in you that have died?
3. By His own waiting time in the tomb, Jesus knows what you are going through and speaks to you:
  - a) Will you be quiet enough to hear me?
  - b) Will you be vulnerable with me?
  - c) Will you wait patiently for me to revive your spirit?
  - d) Will you believe in the power of my resurrection?

\*These questions may not be all mine, but resource is unknown