

## Reflection from Fr. Colm on Holy Saturday

*Audio posted to the Parish Website on Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> April 2020*

Good morning everybody. How was your Good Friday? For me it began with a very short video conference then a phone call with the news from Dublin that Kay had died. Kay was a lifelong friend, wonderful, wonderful person. Highlight of her life was visiting Durham here for my own 25th anniversary of priesthood. She was more than a character in my neighbourhood, she was a personification of kindness and decency in commitment to faith, commitment to parish. Also, her commitment to helping others was a 24/7 task. Nurse by profession, back damage shortened her career, she spent the rest of her life caring for the sick. My parents were fortunate to be recipients of that kindness and regular visits by Kay were often accompanied by laughter, shared stories, gossip and yes, perhaps a glass of Jameson. Kay never married and that was why the circumstances of her own demise yesterday seemed more sad. She was found dead in her home yesterday morning. How she will be missed. That virus, I suspect, took her. At this stage I dare not ask but it certainly makes everything more immediate and personal. Good Friday was perhaps in the context of Kay's faith an appropriate day for her to go - if ever a day is appropriate to go. She was part of the old school, the cross. Central to our faith.

I'm lifted however in the afternoon by a phone call not one of your always look on the bright side of life calls, no, a phone call from a wonderful person initially apologising for intruding on my time but I could sense that feeling of emptiness was there in the breathing. It was real. And then those words, "Father, do please forgive my intrusion." Imagine, in lockdown, in isolation intruding on my space, on my time. As we spoke it became clear that wearisome atmosphere of coronavirus was just too much for the caller, not helped by constant media bombardment of the census of negative news, sad, tragic news. Self-isolating of course had intensified this. However, that word emptiness came back again. Why does this word emptiness usually need an accompanying apology?

Irony of ironies here we are on Holy Saturday invited by the Church to experience that emptiness of a Christian reality. That emptiness which means absence of hope and surely emptiness means what it implies, being empty. We are reminded of our ever-growing difficulty in living

with emptiness by filling those spaces all the time with addictions of all sorts. I'm not talking just about substance abuse here. Eastern Traditions are challenging us within the Christian Tradition more than ever because of their embracing of emptiness, however, thank God for the glory of the Church's liturgy. Holy Thursday we strip the altar, we empty the Tabernacle, *and yet*, yes, we soften that emptiness by having a side altar of repose. The Lord is gone but not quite. Emptiness, too much.

The writer and educationalist George Steiner said, "*Our weeks are a kind of prolonged Holy Saturday.*" Steiner was Jewish. As Christians we are invited to enter the darkness, the emptiness of the night. How else are we to experience the light? The Easter candle, the wonderful Exsultet, shouting, screaming "*Darkness is now vanished, the tomb is empty!*" Is not our present isolation and lockdown a unique form of emptiness and leaves open the possibility of a unique Easter experience? Let's pray that it will be. God bless.