

We continue in the journey of the three holy days known as the Great Triduum.

We are still in the first day, which began last night at sundown and continues to this evening.

This first day is full of activity: Jesus celebrates the Passover in the upper room, he gives them a new commandment, and then very quickly the action moves to the betrayal, arrest, trial, condemnation, death and burial. All this in the first day.

All the gospels record that it was not just the Passover crowds in Jerusalem that were in a turmoil, but apparently also the entire creation: the sky turns black, the tombs are opened, the dead are raised, the rocks are split, the earth quakes, *and* the curtain in the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.

It was this curtain in the temple that marked the separation between what was holy and divine and what was human and created. When Jesus breathed his last this curtain was torn apart, rent

asunder, dismantled. It's as though the heart of God's soul was ripped apart, but in so doing a great thing was accomplished. The tearing of the temple curtain indicates that there is no longer any separation between God and creation. We are brought into union with God. The Roman centurion, at the foot of the cross, is the first to acknowledge that something significant has just happened. He looked at Jesus, and in response to all this turmoil, out of terror he says, "truly this was the the Son of God."

It won't be long before evening comes and we move into the second full day. The first thing that happens this evening is Joseph of Arimathea will ask permission to remove Jesus' body from the cross to prepare it for burial. Carefully Jesus' tortured body will be anointed, wrapped in a linen cloth, and laid to rest. Then Pilate will make sure that the tomb is sealed and the soldiers will stand guard.

After all this activity we move into a period of seeming silence and inaction.

It is the second day that God's activity is most invisible but actually at its greatest peak. This will be the day that God, in Jesus, sealed in a dark tomb, invisible to all the world, continues the work of the incarnation by descending to the depths of hell. There, God finds the lost, sets the captives free, and brings the dead to life. Jesus, the human corpse lies dead and wrapped in a tomb, and all the while Jesus, the Son of God, unshackles the condemned and sets them free.

This is why we call today *Good Friday*. This is why we understand the cross to be the moment of God's glory. We are unshackled from the burdens we carry, absolved from the condemnations we hold so close, and freed from all the accusations sent to us by others. All those things are left powerless by this event. We are invited once again to embrace the unending mercy of God; because after the death and burial comes the greatest silence of all, but also the greatest work of God *for* all.

The curtain in the temple was torn in two - from top to bottom. We gather in an unadorned church which becomes the sealed tomb where God has relinquished all power to fully embrace the human condition. This is not some abstract concept, but it is accomplished in the concrete expression of Jesus of Nazareth, with the result that we are no longer condemned; we are no longer under the curse of death; we are no longer under the deception of the Father of lies.

Jesus' death on the cross and burial in a sealed tomb is *the* most powerful action of God. In the death and burial God has reconciled us and all the world to God's self, all so that we might be free.

