

Genesis 2:2  
Easter Vigil  
April 4, 2026

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

This Easter Vigil is meant to mark the first hours of Easter Sunday (according to the Scriptural calendar, which marks sundown as the beginning of the new day... thus, this service's "sundown" start time)... and, therefore, Holy Saturday – the day that marks Jesus' rest in the tomb – that Holy Saturday is technically now behind us. But the quiet of this night is a good time to meditate upon Jesus' rest in the tomb, especially because that word "rest" is so important in all the Scriptures.

Indeed, if the major motif that seems to connect the Scriptures from bookend to bookend is *marriage* – seen precisely and most divinely and fully in Christ's marriage to His Church – perhaps the major theme that accompanies and blesses that marriage is rest. In fact, the very first rest *Man* ever knew, God took from man's side the means chosen to create man's bride. Then, God gave the man and woman to each other – that was his final and pinnacle creating work – and then He rested, and they rested with Him.

And just as immediately as rest is seen at the beginning of Genesis, it is also seen at the end of Revelation: "Blessed are the

dead who die in the Lord, says the Spirit, for they rest from their labors." Yes, they rest where there are no tears anymore, nor hunger or thirst, nor any scorching heat, but they have rest for their souls.

How does that all tie in to Jesus' three-day rest in the tomb? – And it truly was a *rest*, not (as some think) a continuation of his suffering. No, "It is finished," he cried. And when He gave up his spirit, he was taken down from the cross and laid in the tomb... the sacrifice complete, the atonement made. Now, it was time for *more* than a mere euphemism about death; it was time for rest. For God had given husband for-and-to wife and created her from His side, just as from the beginning. *And* God had joined us into Christ's death, so that – just as at the end, in Revelation – all who die in Christ rest from their labors.

To understand that properly, we must better appreciate this term, "rest."

In Genesis, rest was a gift of God included even in the perfection of creation. From the first seven days, the *shabat* of God was woven into the very fabric of the creation's ongoing time and existence. It needed no 'sinful toil' to justify its existence, for rest was part of creation before the Fall; it simply stood apart from all else within perfection (isn't that what 'holy' means anyway, to stand apart from that which is common, even if that work which is common to daily life is still perfect!). Indeed, the word we translate "Sabbath" has nothing inherently to do with resting *from sin*; it has

to do with desisting, or ceasing, from ordinary activities so that God's specific purpose and activity may prevail... or, as one theological dictionary says it, *sabbath rest* is "disengagement from what is common to honor what is holy" (Biblehub). In that way, even the ground / land (in the Old Testament ritual system) was ritually given to "rest" from its ordinary activity as reminder that the land was owned by the holy God.

But, of course, in the life of the Fall, the word "rest" takes on a different meaning. Our work is now toil; by the sweat of our brow, we slog through this life-riddled-by-sin and grow weak and weary from the struggle. The *perfect* creation would have no understanding of the sinner's comfort in Jesus' words, "Come unto Me, all who are weary and heavy laden; and I will give you rest."

Indeed, there's a *refreshment* in that invitation that the perfection of Eden would have never needed. And that idea of refreshment (which we'll hint at again later) extended into a promise of *forever* rest. In fact, the word *shabat* is supplemented in the Hebrew by another word for rest – *nuach*. Used most tellingly in the books of Deuteronomy and Joshua, which focus on God's deliverance of His people into the promised land, this Hebrew word *nuach* refers to a 'final rest', if you will... the people of God *resting* when they come into the promised land: "When you go over the Jordan and live in the land that the LORD your God is giving you to inherit, and when he gives you rest from all your enemies around, so that you live in

safety... you shall bring [your offerings].” It always seems associated with the *rest* from their enemies, the *rest* found at the consummation of what God has promised, the *rest* associated with safety... not unlike the *rest* Jesus promises the thief on the cross when he says, “Today, you will be with me in paradise.”

But the Hebrew and Greek are not the same; and, where the word *Sabbath* does show up in the Greek to refer to the day of the week (as the creation continues to keep time), that’s not the word Jesus uses when he says, “Come unto Me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you *rest*.” That word is ἀναπαύσω... to *pause* from labor, but for a precise benefit of *refreshment*. This ‘rest for refreshment’ is what Jesus alludes to when he says, “The Son of Man is lord over the Sabbath” ... not just Lord over the Third Commandment, but the giver of the promised rest and divine refreshment the Third Commandment was given to defend and maintain.

And the Son of Man could rightly call himself Lord over the Sabbath not just because God is Lord over the laws of the *old* creation, but because the Son of Man is Lord over the new creation... because He became, in his own body, not only our sacrifice and source of *redemption*, but therefore also our source of *rest and refreshment*.

That rest and refreshment is ours each time He gathers us – most recognizably, the connection between the resurrection of our

Lord and the feast of victory, His risen body and blood, as we feast upon it again in this morning to come... such rest for our **souls** in the Word of forgiveness that fills our ears and renews in our hearts the certainty of our baptismal inheritance of eternal life; such rest for our **bodies** in the feast upon our Paschal Lamb, for our own body's preparation for its own rest in the tomb and its share in the glorious victory of the resurrection.

Indeed, this is the great benefit, the solemn joy, of Jesus' rest in the tomb. It was a rest of the victorious, a taking unto himself all the refreshment of victory, that He might rise and share it with those He would baptismally make his fellow conquerors. In fact, our Lutheran burial rite begins the prayer at the graveside this way: "Lord Jesus Christ, by your three-day rest in the tomb you hallowed the graves of all who believe in you." Much like Jesus, by his own baptism, made plain water to be entrance to eternal life; he, by his own burial, makes the tomb to no longer be the eternal sleep of death, but a temporal, holy sleep... that our body may 'rest in peace'... true and divine peace, in preparation for its share in the victory known by Christ's own body.

Perhaps he himself hinted at this when he said of Jairus' daughter, "She is not dead, but sleeping." The onlookers may have mocked him for such a claim; they may deride *you* for such a hope; but do not the Scriptures promise that you will have the last laugh... or, far more importantly, you will have the blessing of God. How

does the Revelation to St John say it?: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.” “Blessed indeed”, says the Spirit, “that they *rest* from their labors” (14:13).

There’s that word, “rest.” And, because the Lord has hallowed the grave by his own three-day rest in the tomb, your own time in the grave will be but a blessed slumber... a refreshing sleep that leads to the eternal inheritance of the promised land of the new creation. Yes, “*blessed* are the dead who die in the Lord, says the Spirit, for they rest from their labors.”

Now, notice for a moment (in that quote from Revelation) the emphasis on the Spirit testifying to this... the same Holy Spirit given you in your baptism – “the washing of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Lord.” That gift of the Holy Spirit – for you, your children, all who are far off, whom the Lord our God calls to Himself – that gift ties you not only to Christ’s sufficient suffering and death, but therefore also to his glorious resurrection and life... that you who are joined to Christ in a death like his may, after such a holy and sanctified rest, join in a resurrection like his.

And, in *view* of that resurrection, what does the Spirit say in that Revelation passage? Listen again to the tail end of what I just cited, and then to the little phrase that concludes the thought: “Blessed indeed!” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, for their works follow them.”

Their works follow them – Jesus’ work followed him to the grave – “It is finished, accomplished” – that his grave would not be a place of condemnation, but a rest of the victorious. Jesus’ work hallowed that grave, that in Christ, his work hallows and, if you will, follows you, forgives your sin, and leaves only the fruit of the Spirit, so that in your own resurrection, the Lord Christ will say to you, “I was hungry and you gave me to eat; thirsty and you gave me to drink...” And, though, you will not recall doing such things – “When did we do these things?” he will inform you, “When you did this to the least of my brothers...” and, thereby, your works will have followed you. They follow you, not for justification – that’s his work that follows you – but, by the Scripture’s own testimony, your blessed works follow you for Christ’s joy and your blessing.

Yet, if we were too caught up in such things, we would never be willing to rest, for we would always worry (like Martha before us) of the contribution of our works toward the eventual *earning* of our rest. No, “Come unto Me; I will *give* you rest.”

Instead, rejoice in his three-day rest in the tomb... divine indication that His work justified us, sanctified us, and follows us into and keeps us safe in death... indeed, His work *leads* us into and through the grave unto the promised land and, in that promised land, an eternal rest... a rest beyond the grave, a rest of new life in the new creation... not just a temporary cessation from life, but a

constant, never-ending, eternal state of being refreshed in the perfection of God.

We perhaps lose sight of this unique benefit in the grand picture of life everlasting, but the Scriptures don't. They speak of this divine refreshment as one safeguarded by the holy God! Indeed, two chapters of the Epistle to the Hebrews focus on God's jealous safeguarding of His divine rest. Repeatedly we hear in Hebrews 3 and 4 God's condemnation of the faithless Israelites, "As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.'"

But, the Spirit – the same Spirit who came to you in baptism and says, "Blessed indeed!, that they may rest from their labors!" – that Spirit exhorts those who learn from the example of the Israelites, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." And for those whose hearts are not hardened toward their need for rescue, their need for a Savior, for those whose hearts leap this night in joy of the completed atoning work of Christ and in anticipation of the proclamation anew of his glorious resurrection, for you who rejoice this evening and morning and throughout your daily life, the epistle continues,

"There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God... whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his [own] works as God did from his. Let us therefore strive to enter *that* rest."

Yes, as God rested from His work on the seventh day of the first week, *and* on the seventh day of Holy Week, and thereby

hallowed the graves of all who hope in Him, those who *hide* in Jesus may *rest soundly* in Him... rest from their own toil and the impossibility of their own merit, rest from their own works, and sleep safely in His, certain that the proclamation of His resurrection is also the promise of yours.

In the Name of the Father  
And of the Son  
And of the Holy Spirit.  
+ AMEN +

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