

## 14<sup>th</sup> SCRIPTURAL STATION - JESUS IS LAID IN THE TOMB

By Fr Robbie Low

(Jn 19 v 38 -42. Lk 23 v 50 -56. Mk 15 v 42-47. Mt 27 v 57-61)

‘And did those feet, in ancient time, walk upon England’s mountains green?’

The dereliction is complete. The broken pierced body of the once and future King is lowered to the earth. The bleeding corpus bleeds no more and rests, as once so long ago in Bethlehem’s strange place of welcome, in his mother’s arms. The Pieta of eternal pity, the last encounter of this mortal love.

No preparation for this tragic unseen. The usual destiny of the corpse of the condemned is lime pit and dissolution.

Old Joseph takes the lead, who once, so legend tells, traversed the Middle Sea and, northbound, traded on the distant coasts of tin and walked the ancient Tor with this young boy in tow and planted such a thorn as would endure and resonate the young king’s tortured crown and draw men hence on pilgrimage down all the days to come.

The Governor concedes the body to this well connected citizen. The secret followers of Christ convene. The night time visitor, who first heard the great gospel of redemption from this dead man’s lips, emerges from this dreadful dusk to help his co-conspirator and friend. Nicodemus – ‘that whosoever believes in Him should not perish’ – echoing like mocking in his ears, bears the weight and together, to the nearby. house of death, they now repair.

A stranger's grave, an unknown tomb – Not unknown to Joseph or to me.  
It is my tomb, my grave, the Lord of Life now inherits, that, by His dying, I may  
go free and live.

Here in a garden, where it all began, here it ends. Here it will begin again.  
From Eden to Gethsemane to the Garden Tomb. The long road home for fallen  
Man, the hidden rebus of God's eternal plan. Christ child, from His mother's  
arms now cavered in the rock and swathed in linens as a new born babe.  
Another darker Bethlehem.

Here, in the strange mercy of Man, appears entombed the final mercy of God  
and His final defeat, while demons squeal delight and the weary world,  
heedless and undaunted, plods sightless, unawares and ignorant on its witless  
way.

The darkness, that accompanied the noontide sign of the extinction of the  
primordial light by which all came to be, has resolved into the fullness of the  
night, the eve of Passover.

The trembling in the tombs of holy men long passed disturbs the strata of the  
city's hills. In the streets the saints are now seen walking, strange presages of  
what is now afoot amidst the houses of the dead.

The Temple curtain rent. The separation of God and Man brought down.

And whilst, to ground in sorrow, the men who followed Him in life, seek safety  
in obscurity and hiding places, the covert Christ is moving to reclaim the long-  
time lost of Eden's paradise.

That blaze of blinding glory seen on Tabor's height begins to metamorphosize  
behind the undertaker's hasty rags. The Life which has informed all life, begins

to traverse the deep realms of Death. Satan's triumph now translating into error and alarm. The God whom he had trapped within his web of death now rampant in the city of the dark. The pierced feet have kicked down the doors of Hell and stand triumphant on their cruciform debris. The lock is scattered in a thousand pieces by this bloody absolution. The citadel of sin is now besieged and stormed by God Himself disguised in Man, wielding the weapons of His Majestic mercy and compassion's armaments. This rotten kingdom, this rebel redoubt of man's ruin is now undone. The wounded hands reach down into the dark, illuminate by joy. The wrists of exiled Adam and poor foolish Eve now safe in His sure grip as they are lifted out of the dungeons of despair and salvaged from the wastelands of the long and lonely alienation of their sin.

The Cherubim put up their whirling swords at Eden's long barred gates and prepare the guard of honour for their returning and victorious Lord and the freeborn captives of His love.

All this unseen by those who weep in despair and, huddled in misery, pass this long night in perplexity of spirit and confusion.

The mystery will begin to resolve only in the morning of the Third Day when the Magdalene finds the Tabernacle empty of death. When the locked room entertains a sudden guest. When, on the long road out of town in desolation, they encounter the Presence, the stranger who reveals the Word, turns them around, homebound, hearts burning for a new Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, beyond the secrecy of that sealed tomb, the Harrowing has begun.