**Holy Week and the Triduum**

*Beginning with the Easter Triduum as its source of light, the new age of the Resurrection fills the whole liturgical year with its brilliance. Gradually, on either side of this source, the year is transfigured by the liturgy. It really is a "year of the Lord's favor." The economy of salvation is at work within the framework of time, but since its fulfillment in the Passover of Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the culmination of history is anticipated "as a foretaste," and the kingdom of God enters into our time.*

*Therefore Easter is not simply one feast among others, but the "Feast of feasts," the "Solemnity of solemnities," just as the Eucharist is the "Sacrament of sacraments" (the Great Sacrament). St. Athanasius calls Easter "the Great Sunday" and the Eastern Churches call Holy Week "the Great Week." The mystery of the Resurrection, in which Christ crushed death, permeates with its powerful energy our old time, until all is subjected to him.*

* *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1168-9

In previous weeks, we discussed the Liturgical Year, reflecting on the various seasons and feasts of the Church’s calendar. In considering the Triduum, we have come to the very “source of light” which “fills the whole liturgical year with its brilliance.” Triduum refers to Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday. The word *triduum* comes from the Latin for “three days.” This can be slightly confusing at first glance as it appears we are talking about *four* days, rather than three. But, the Triduum begins on Thursday evening (with the Mass of the Lord’s Supper), and concludes on Easter Sunday evening. So, we have Thursday evening to Friday evening, Friday evening to Saturday evening, and Saturday evening to Sunday evening, which is three days’ time. This brings us to the very heart of the mystery of Christ, His passion, death, and Resurrection. This is of such singular importance, that the Triduum is its own liturgical season (the season of Lent concludes with the start of the Mass of the Lord’s Supper)!

To prepare for this most solemn of times, we have the season of Lent, which intensifies with the beginning of Holy Week (the Sunday before Easter). Here, we will reflect briefly on each day during this time.

Palm (or Passion) Sunday

On the Sunday before Easter, we commemorate Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says the following about Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem:

"When the days drew near for him to be taken up [Jesus] set his face to go to Jerusalem." By this decision he indicated that he was going up to Jerusalem prepared to die there. Three times he had announced his Passion and Resurrection; now, heading toward Jerusalem, Jesus says: "It cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem."

Jesus recalls the martyrdom of the prophets who had been put to death in Jerusalem. Nevertheless he persists in calling Jerusalem to gather around him: "How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!" When Jerusalem comes into view he weeps over her and expresses once again his heart's desire: "Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But now they are hid from your eyes

*Jesus' entry into Jerusalem* manifested the coming of the kingdom that the King-Messiah was going to accomplish by the Passover of his Death and Resurrection. It is with the celebration of that entry on Palm Sunday that the Church's liturgy solemnly opens Holy Week (CCC, no. 558-560).

**Monday and Tuesday of Holy Week**

On Monday of Holy Week, the Gospel reading tells of Jesus at the house of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus (whom He raised from the dead) in Bethany, six days before Passover, when Mary anoints Jesus’ feet with oil (see John 12:3-11).

There are several details from this Gospel worth noting: first, Jesus connects Mary’s action to His burial. Second, John tells us that it is Judas the Iscariot who is “the one who would betray him.” Lastly, we see the plotting of the chief priests, who will play an instrumental role in the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus. In the Gospel for Tuesday, we see Judas leave the company of Jesus and the other Apostles in order to betray Jesus. Also, it is here that Jesus’ foretells that Peter will deny even knowing Him.

**Wednesday of Holy Week**

On Wednesday, we remember the betrayal of Judas. In the Gospel we hear: the chief priests “paid [Judas] thirty pieces of silver, and from that time on he looked for an opportunity to hand him over” (Matthew 26:15-16).

**Holy Thursday**

Two important liturgical celebrations take place on Holy Thursday. During the day, the priests of each diocese (as many as possible) gather with the bishop in the cathedral for the blessing of the oils used in the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Orders, and Anointing of the Sick. This is referred to as the Chrism Mass. All the sacred oils that will be used throughout the diocese for that year are blessed on this occasion. This reminds us that the power of all the sacraments flows out from the passion, death, and Resurrection of Jesus.

In the evening, we celebrate the Mass of the Lord’s Supper. This includes the ceremony of the washing of the feet, as well as a commemoration of the institution of the Eucharist (the Last Supper was the first Mass). We meditate in a profound way on the great gift of the Eucharist (Jesus’ Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity). Additionally, it is on this day that Jesus instituted the priesthood, for He tells His Apostles: “Do this in memory of me.” Let us also, on this day, reflect on the priesthood and pray for our priests and for an increase in vocations.

**Good Friday**

On Good Friday, we join together as a Church for a day of fast and abstinence in commemoration of the passion and death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Good Friday is the only day of the Church year on which the Mass is not celebrated. Fr. Ryan Erlenbush explains:

St. Thomas discusses this question and says: “The figure ceases on the advent of the reality. But this sacrament is a figure and a representation of our Lord's Passion, as stated above. And therefore on the day on which our Lord's Passion is recalled as it was really accomplished, this sacrament is not consecrated.” (ST III, q.83, a.2, ad 2)

Precisely because the Mass is a sacrament, it is a sign (not a *mere* sign, but a sign which contains a reality). However, in the commemoration of the Passion on Friday of Holy Week, the reality of the sacrifice is presented to the faithful not as a sacrament (i.e. not through the Mass) but “as it was really accomplished.” The Good Friday liturgy is, in fact, a more perfect *re-presentation* of the sacrifice of the Cross than is the Eucharistic liturgy. The Catholic faithful are more perfectly united to Calvary on Good Friday than they are by the offering of the Mass on any other day of the year.

Not of course, that there is anything lacking in the Eucharistic sacrifice offered every other day; but the Church, on Good Friday, recalls (with a special efficacy) the Lord’s Passion in its *reality* and not in its *figure*. Through the sacrament of the Eucharist, the very reality of the Cross is truly and really present under the figure of the sacrament – for, just as Christ’s blood poured forth from his body as he was pierced upon the Cross, so too the body and blood of Christ are sacramentally separated upon the altar during the Mass. There is no defect in the Eucharistic sacrifice: It is real and true, as a sacramental reality (and the sacraments are certainly real).

Still, on Good Friday, the sacrifice of the Cross is offered and commemorated not as a sacrament (that is, not as a figure or sign), but in the reality of its proper species – “as it was really accomplished.” Thus, just as the figure passes away in the advent of the reality, the Church does not offer the sacrifice of the Mass at the Good Friday commemoration of our Lord’s Passion (Fr. Ryan Erlenbush, “There is no Mass on Good Friday and there is no Mass in heaven,” *The New Theological Movement*, web, retrieved 27 Feb. 2015).

**Holy Saturday**

Holy Saturday commemorates the burial of Jesus and His descent into hell. Though Catholics are not obligated to do so (as we are on Good Friday), the Church does encourage that we continue the fast of Good Friday on this day, until the celebration of the Easter Vigil.

The *Catechism* reads:

"By the grace of God" Jesus tasted death "for every one". In his plan of salvation, God ordained that his Son should not only "die for our sins" but should also "taste death", experience the condition of death, the separation of his soul from his body, between the time he expired on the cross and the time he was raised from the dead. The state of the dead Christ is the mystery of the tomb and the descent into hell. It is the mystery of Holy Saturday, when Christ, lying in the tomb, reveals God's great sabbath rest after the fulfillment of man's salvation, which brings peace to the whole universe (CCC, no. 624).

The *Catechism* goes on to explain the meaning of Jesus “descending into hell”:

Scripture calls the abode of the dead, to which the dead Christ went down, "hell" - *Sheol*in Hebrew or *Hades*in Greek - because those who are there are deprived of the vision of God. Such is the case for all the dead, whether evil or righteous, while they await the Redeemer: which does not mean that their lot is identical, as Jesus shows through the parable of the poor man Lazarus who was received into "Abraham's bosom": "It is precisely these holy souls, who awaited their Savior in Abraham's bosom, whom Christ the Lord delivered when he descended into hell." Jesus did not descend into hell to deliver the damned, nor to destroy the hell of damnation, but to free the just who had gone before him (CCC, no. 633).

**Easter Vigil**

On the evening of Saturday, when darkness has fallen, we have the celebration of the Easter Vigil, “the mother of all vigils.” In the liturgy, we hear the beautiful Easter Proclamation (the Exsultet):

Rejoice, heavenly powers! Sing, choirs of angels!
Exult, all [creation](http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=3475) around God's throne!
Jesus Christ, our King, is risen!
Sound the trumpet of salvation!

Rejoice, O earth, in shining splendor,
radiant in the brightness of your King!
Christ has conquered! [Glory](http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=5201) fills you!
Darkness vanishes for ever!

Rejoice, O Mother Church! Exult in glory!
The risen Savior shines upon you!
Let this place resound with joy,
echoing the mighty song of all God's people!

[My dearest friends, standing with me in this holy light,
join me in asking [God](http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=5217) for mercy,
that he may give his unworthy [minister](http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=8005)
grace to sing his [Easter](http://www.catholic.org/clife/easter/) praises.]

[V. The [Lord](http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=5217) be with you.
R. And also with you.]

V. Lift up your hearts.
R. We lift them up to the Lord.

V. Let us give thanks to the [Lord](http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=5217) our God.
R. It is [right](http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=10046) to give him thanks and praise.

It is truly right
that with full hearts and minds and voices
we should praise the unseen God, the all-powerful Father,
and his only Son, our [Lord](http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=5217) [Jesus](http://www.catholic.org/clife/jesus) Christ.

For [Christ](http://www.catholic.org/clife/jesus) has ransomed us with his blood,
and paid for us the price of Adam's [sin](http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=10849)
to our eternal Father!

This is our [passover](http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=9038) feast,
when Christ, the true Lamb, is slain,
whose blood consecrates the [homes](http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=5867) of all believers.

This is the night when first you saved our fathers:
you freed the people of Israel from their slavery
and led them dry-shod through the sea.
This is the night when the pillar of fire
destroyed the darkness of sin!

This is the night when Christians everywhere,
washed clean of sin
and freed from all defilement,
are restored to [grace](http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=5305) and grow together in holiness.

This is the night when [Jesus](http://www.catholic.org/clife/jesus) [Christ](http://www.catholic.org/clife/jesus)
broke the chains of death
and rose triumphant from the grave.
What [good](http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=5257) would [life](http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=7101) have been to us,
had [Christ](http://www.catholic.org/clife/jesus) not come as our Redeemer?

Father, how wonderful your care for us!
How boundless your merciful love!
To ransom a slave
you gave away your Son.

O happy fault, O necessary [sin](http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=10849) of Adam,
which gained for us so great a Redeemer!
Most blessed of all nights, chosen by [God](http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=5217)
to see [Christ](http://www.catholic.org/clife/jesus) rising from the dead!

Of this night [scripture](http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=10624) says:
"The night [will](http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=12332) be as clear as day:
it [will](http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=12332) become my light, my joy."

The power of this holy night
dispels all evil, washes guilt away,
restores lost innocence, brings mourners joy;
it casts out hatred, brings us peace, and humbles earthly
pride.

Night truly blessed when [heaven](http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=5593) is wedded to earth
and [man](http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=7463) is reconciled with God!
Therefore, heavenly Father, in the joy of this night,
receive our evening [sacrifice](http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=10284) of praise,
your Church's solemn offering.

Accept this [Easter](http://www.catholic.org/clife/easter/) candle,
a flame divided but undimmed,
a pillar of fire that glows to the honor of God.

Let it mingle with the [lights](http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=7103) of [heaven](http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=5593)
and continue bravely burning
to dispel the darkness of this night!

May the morning Star which never sets find this flame
still burning:
Christ, that Morning Star, who came back from the dead,
and shed his peaceful light on all mankind,
your Son who lives and reigns for ever and ever.

R. Amen.

[Source: The 1975 Sacramentary]

**Easter Sunday**

**Priest**: “Christ is risen, Alleluia!”

**All**: “Christ is truly risen, Alleluia!”

From the *Catechism*:

The Paschal mystery has two aspects: by his death, Christ liberates us from sin; by his Resurrection, he opens for us the way to a new life. This new life is above all justification that reinstates us in God's grace, "so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." Justification consists in both victory over the death caused by sin and a new participation in grace. It brings about filial adoption so that men become Christ's brethren, as Jesus himself called his disciples after his Resurrection: "Go and tell my brethren." We are brethren not by nature, but by the gift of grace, because that adoptive filiation gains us a real share in the life of the only Son, which was fully revealed in his Resurrection.

Finally, Christ's Resurrection - and the risen Christ himself is the principle and source of our future resurrection: "Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. . . For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." The risen Christ lives in the hearts of his faithful while they await that fulfillment. In Christ, Christians "have tasted. . . the powers of the age to come" and their lives are swept up by Christ into the heart of divine life, so that they may "live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised (CCC, no. 654-5).