

The Triduum

Three in One, One in Three

Our church tells us that our celebration of the Triduum is the "culmination of the entire liturgical year." Our celebration of the **Triduum** (*tres dies* = 3 days) begins with the celebration of the *Lord's Supper* and ends with *Evening Prayer* on Easter Sunday Evening (which we are all too exhausted to rise. (At least I am.) Our church tells us that the **Triduum** is not so much three celebrations. (Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Vigil) but *one* continuous celebration with three parts to it. The *unitive* nature of the three liturgies is underlined by the omission of a concluding rite on Holy Thursday and Good Friday. These two liturgies are "left hanging," so to speak, incomplete without that which follows, as if the liturgies of Holy Thursday and Good Friday are saying to us, "*we are not done yet. To be continued.*"

The Meaning

What are we celebrating in this continuous "three in one and one in three" liturgy? We are celebrating the Passover or passion of Jesus Christ. By dying and rising God's Son broke the bonds of death and was restored to life. The connection and meaning for us is that if we unite our lives to Christ, he will take us through our pain and darkness and lead us into the fullness of God's light.

Nothing in our church year is more important than our celebration of the Triduum. Perhaps one reason that the church has not made these days holy days of obligation is that by doing so, she would be stating the obvious. It would be like making it obligatory for us to celebrate Independence Day or an important anniversary. No one should have to tell us to come to church on these days. If we are in touch with our Catholic Christian tradition we would automatically plan to be there. Now for a brief look at each of the three moments of this one continuous celebration.

Holy Thursday-Celebration of the Lord's Supper

Lent is now over and now we begin the joyful celebration of the **Triduum**. As we do so, we anticipate the Resurrection. The mood is one of joy (white vestments), the Gloria is sung and bells of joy are rung throughout the Gloria. Of course, our joy will not be complete until we celebrate the Easter Vigil.

On this evening, the *first reading* recounts the story of the Israelites Passover from slavery to liberation. In the *second reading* we have Paul's account of the Last Supper which celebrates the Christian Passover. The reading ends with these words:

*For as often as you eat this bread and
drink this cup,
you proclaim the death of the Lord
until he comes.*

Eucharist not only remembers and mystically makes present an event that occurred 2,000 years ago, but it also foreshadows the eternal banquet of heaven.

Gospel-Washing of the Feet. The Call to Serve.

The gospel is John's moving account of Jesus washing the feet of the Apostles. So sacred and important is this symbolic action, that some wondered in the early church if it should be one of the sacraments. It is, of course, sacramental in the sense that through this action the Apostles did receive the love which Jesus had for them; but, the main point of this servile action (only slaves used to wash peoples feet) was to teach disciples of every generation that following Jesus implies a willingness and readiness to *serve* others.

This Holy Thursday we will extend this ritual action of washing to all who wish to have their feet washed. As Presider and standing in for Jesus, I will wash *some* of the wonderful servants of our parish family. Then they will be sent into

several locations into the assembly where others present will be welcomed to have their feet washed.

Preparation of Altar and Presentation of Gifts

At this time, the altar will be dressed and prepared for our Eucharistic banquet. Then the three jars of *Sacred Oils* blessed at the *Chrism Mass* at the Shrine the day before will be brought forward.

Then we will have a *Procession of food and money for the poor*.

In a Letter from the Vatican on the *Triduum*, we read these words.

Gifts for the poor, especially those collected during Lent as a result of penitential practices, may be presented in the procession of gifts as people sing "where charity and love are found."

Even if you haven't collected a lot of food for the poor during Lent, you are encouraged to bring one or more food items to church on Holy Thursday; also, if you have utilized the *Rice Bowl* during Lent, this is a great time to bring forward what you collected. If you didn't utilize the Rice Bowl during Lent, we invite you to bring a donation which will be sent to *Catholic Relief Services*- a wonderful arm of our church that represents us mostly overseas bringing so much needed relief to the poor. The food items will of course, go to our *Social Concerns* office.

Please note: This year we will invite all who attend this Mass to come forward in procession with a food item and money for the poor. So *don't* leave your food item in the church foyer. Bring it into church so that you can bring it forward during the Presentation of the Gifts. (If you are unable to come forward because of walking difficulties you can ask someone around you to bring forward your gift.) I am sure it will please Our Savior very much to see his sanctuary filled with food and money for the poor. Before we receive the Divine Body of Christ, we are asked to feed the hungry members of the Body of Christ. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, tells us that "*participation in the Eucharist commits us to caring for the poor.*"

Our "*pray brothers and sisters that our sacrifice may be acceptable to God, the Almighty Father,*" is greatly enhanced when the banquet table is laden with offerings for the poor.

After Holy Communion, we will have what is called the *Transfer of the Eucharist* to a chapel of repose. Since there is no Mass on Good Friday we need to reserve consecrated hosts for the Good Friday communion service.

After the procession the *altar is stripped* , a gesture symbolizing the stripping of Jesus during his Passion.

Finally, note that there is no final blessing or "let us go forth in peace...." Remember what I said earlier the *Triduum* is not three celebrations, but one. What we started this evening will be continued the next day.

Adoration Chapel. On Holy Thursday at 7:00 pm, the Eucharist will be removed from the Chapel prior to the celebration of the Lord's Supper at 7:30 pm. It will be returned *after* the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday, about 11:00 pm. After Holy Communion on Holy Thursday the consecrated hosts which will be used on Good Friday, will be taken into Our Lady's Chapel, where there will be adoration until midnight. At midnight the hosts will be taken from Our Lady's Chapel and placed on the altar of repose.

GOOD FRIDAY-CELEBRATION OF THE LORD'S PASSION

Our prayer on Good Friday will begin at *noon* with the *Stations of the Cross* and continue at 7:30 pm with the *Celebration of the Lord's Passion*. This is a day of fast and abstinence.

The first thing one might wonder or ask about this day is why is this event called "*Good*" Friday, when it was the day the Son of God was cruelly tortured and crucified? This day is called *Good* Friday because it was the day Jesus willingly sacrificed his life for us and our sins. It is called "Good" because it shows forth the absolute goodness of God on our behalf. This celebration has *three parts*: The Liturgy of the Word, the Veneration of the Cross and Holy Communion.

Part I-Liturgy of the Word

The first reading is a powerful passage about a mysterious *suffering servant* who is willing to lay down his life for the many. The early Christians quickly saw in this suffering servant the figure of Christ. In the *second reading* from Hebrews, Christ, the High Priest, the source of our salvation, is extolled and exalted. On Good Friday, the Passion is always the Passion according to *John*. In John's Passion, Jesus is freely laying down his life for us. Pilate thinks he is the one with power over Jesus, but, Jesus reminds him that he "*would have no power over him if it were not given to him from above.*"

The Liturgy of the Word is followed by *Intercessions* for twelve groups of people. The church prays for believers and unbelievers. Jesus said "*When I am lifted up, I will draw all people to myself.*" To be truly Catholic, the church must show its concerns for *all*.

Part 2-Veneration of the Cross

We, as church, venerate the cross as an act of gratitude to Christ, who turned the wood of the cross an instrument of torture, into the means of our redemption and a sign of God's infinite love. Using a phrase from W. B. Yeats, we can say the cross is a "Terrible Beauty". "Terrible" in that it symbolizes what sinners did to the 'Light of the World' "Beauty" in that it manifests God's love for us. The cross is what gives meaning to our suffering. On Good Friday, when we come forward to venerate the cross, we bring all the pain, hurt and suffering in our lives and unite them to the sufferings of Jesus.

Part 3-Communion Rite

No Mass is celebrated on Good Friday. We receive hosts consecrated on Holy Thursday. This connects both services. In our reception of holy communion, we continue to "*Proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes in glory.*" As on Holy Thursday, there is NO concluding rite. All depart in silence. This tells us "we are not done yet" with our celebration of the Lord's Passion. It will be continued tomorrow evening, after sunset, with the Easter vigil.

Three Quotes to Consider

Recently, I came across the following three quotes which fit nicely with today's celebration.

1. "*Forgiving the unforgivable is hard. So was the cross: hard words, hard wood, hard nails (William Stoddard).*"

St. Anselm, a Medieval scholar wrote:

2. "*O hidden strength! A man hanging on a cross lifts the weight of eternal death; a man fixed on wood frees the world from death. O hidden power!*"

Mahatma Gandhi, prophet of non-violent resistance wrote:

3. "*A man who was completely innocent, offered himself as a sacrifice for the good of others, including his enemies, and became the ransom of the world. It was a perfect act.*"

The Easter Vigil

St. Gregory of Nazianzus, called the *Easter Vigil* the "solemnity of solemnities." St. Augustine called it the "Mother of Vigils." In the early church the *Vigil* started after sunset and *continued* all night until sunrise. So, we can say our celebration of the *Easter Vigil* is a "mini-celebration." The *Vigil* is of course, the most solemn and important celebration of the entire Liturgical year-more important than midnight Mass at Christmas. The *Vigil* celebrates the victory of Jesus over the darkness of Good Friday, his victory over sin and death. The *Easter Vigil* has four main parts.

The Service of Light.

The *Easter Vigil* begins outdoors with the lighting and blessing of the Easter Fire. All participants are encouraged to gather outside for this beautiful ritual. Our new *Paschal Candle* is then lit from the Easter fire. We process into a dark church (symbolizing the world without Christ) with the Paschal Candle chanting "Lumen Christi" (Light of Christ). The Service of Light concludes with the beautiful chanting of the *Exultet* which celebrates Christ's victory over death.

2) *Liturgy of the Word.*

The church provides for us seven readings from the Hebrew Scriptures and two readings from the New Testament. All of the readings are connected in some way with baptism which we will celebrate after the Liturgy of the Word. More specifically, the readings speak about creation, liberation, obedience, water, new life in the spirit, resurrection. Our singing of a psalm after each reading is our *response* to the word we have heard. St. Augustine says to us: "*Watch I tell you and pray. Let us celebrate the vigil internally and externally. Listen to God speak to us in the readings. Let us speak to him in our prayers. If we hear his words obediently, he to whom we pray will dwell in us.*" (Easter Vigil Sermon).

3) *Celebration of Baptism*

St. Paul was the first person to link baptism with Christ's passage through death to life: "*Do you know that all of us who have been baptized in Christ Jesus, were baptized into his death.*" Hence, from the earliest days of our church's history, baptism took place at the Easter Vigil. After several years in the catechumenate the unbaptized were initiated into the Christian community by receiving the three sacraments of initiation: baptism, confirmation and first Eucharist. Today, the already baptized (*Candidates*) are also received into *Full Communion* with our church. They *complete* their *initiation* by receiving the sacraments of confirmation and first Eucharist.

This part of the Vigil is very beautiful and rich with sacred ritual. The *Elect* (the unbaptized) are called forth and presented to the community. They process around the church as the community chants the *Litany of the Saints* invoking their prayers for these brothers and sisters who are about to enter the baptismal waters. The waters of our makeshift baptismal pool are solemnly blessed. Then follows the *Profession of Faith* and *baptism*. While the elect change into their white robes we the already baptized are sprinkled with the newly blessed holy water as we renew our own baptismal praises.

Then the *Candidates* (the already baptized in another Christian denomination) are called forth and presented to the community. They make a Profession of Faith and are received into *Full Communion with our Church* and with the newly baptized receive the Sacrament of Confirmation.

4) *Liturgy of the Eucharist*

The Easter Vigil reaches its culminating point in the celebration of the Eucharist. Our church tells us that tonight's Eucharist is the "*Easter Sacrament paramount. It is the consummation of Christian initiation and a foretaste of the everlasting Easter.*" Each Sunday at the 9:30 AM Mass we have watched the then catechumens (unbaptized) and candidates (the baptized) leave our church after the Liturgy of the Word. We sent them forth to "reflect more on God's word" and await that moment when they "can fully partake with us at the Table of the Lord". That moment is now here. They come forward with their godparents, sponsors and catechists to receive the body and blood of Christ.

I urge you with all my heart to make a special effort to participate in our celebration of the *Triduum*, the highpoint of our church's year. I encourage parents to introduce your children to these beautiful celebrations. Sit up front so that your children can see everything that is going on and become engaged in it.