

# Holy Week and Triduum

*This is the final installment of information about Holy Week and Triduum. We hope that this has been useful to you, to each of us of the significance of Holy Week and Triduum in the life of our parish and in our faith. For some, this is a review and reminder; for others, it may be the first time you have a chance to think carefully about exactly what it is we are remembering and celebrating during this special time.*

Holy Week – Holy Week is the final period before Easter Sunday. As we conclude the journey of Lent, we turn our attention in a very intense and mindful way to the final days of Jesus’s life. We walk the journey with Our Lord.

Palm / Passion Sunday – Holy Week begins with the celebration of Jesus’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem, riding on a donkey, to the acclaim of the crowds along the way. We hear the Gospel account of this journey and wave our blessed palms as we walk in procession from the outside of the church to the interior. We accompany Jesus from the exultation of his entry into Jerusalem to the suffering of his passion and death as we hear the Gospel Passion narrative read. The liturgical color of this day is red, which is the traditional color of suffering and martyrdom.

Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday – These “in between” days are still significant for our observation of Holy Week. On Monday, the Gospel recounts when Mary of Bethany (sister of Martha and Lazarus) anointed Jesus’s feet with oil, foreshadowing his impending death. Tuesday, we hear Jesus foretelling the betrayal of Judas during the Last Supper. On Wednesday (sometimes called Spy Wednesday) the Gospel reading is about Judas plotting with the chief priests to hand Jesus over to them. The liturgical color remains the purple of Lent, signifying our repentance.

Also on Monday, in our diocese, the Chrism Mass is held at the cathedral. At this Mass, Bishop Knestout will bless all the Holy Oils (Oil of the Sick, Oil of Catechumens, and the Sacred Chrism) that will be used in the churches of the diocese for the coming year. These oils help link our celebration of the sacraments here at St. Ann to the universal church. In addition, the bishop and all the priests of the diocese renew their vows of priestly service to the people of God. Traditionally, the Chrism Mass takes place on Holy Thursday, but in an acknowledgement of the challenges of Holy Week, in our diocese and others it is celebrated on Monday.

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Triduum – People often ask, “What is that?” when we talk about the Triduum. The word – pronounced “TRIH-doo-um” – comes from the Latin for “three days.” Beginning with the Lord’s Supper on Thursday night and continuing to Easter Sunday evening, these three days form the most important days of the Church year. They are significant because our faith in Jesus, dead and risen, all comes together in these three days. In the early Church, the days were observed as one long liturgy; we still see vestiges of that single liturgy in the fact that, after the greeting and sign of the cross on Holy Thursday, there is no greeting or dismissal at the liturgies until the end of the Easter Vigil on Saturday. During these days, we penetrate in great depth the mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection. We take three days to celebrate this great foundation of our faith because it is simply too powerful and rich for a one-day celebration.

Holy Thursday – As Triduum begins, our focus is on two important themes: Eucharist and service. We celebrate Christ’s giving himself to us in his body and blood at the Last Supper, the source and foundation of our Mass. This is why the altar and vestments are white on Holy Thursday and also why we have a brief return of the Gloria at this Mass – don’t forget to bring your bells! We hear the Gospel account of Jesus’s action and message of service, and we obey him in the washing of the feet. Here at St. Ann, our Confirmation students lead us in this act of service – as their feet are washed, they turn to do the same for the community. Jesus says, “As I have done for you, so you also must do.” All are invited and welcome to come forward. Also at this Mass, the Holy Oils, blessed by Bishop Knestout at the Chrism Mass on Monday, are presented to the community by members of the parish.

Watch during the Eucharistic Prayer as Fr. Ernest consecrates enough additional hosts so that we can all receive communion on Friday (more on that below). At the end of the Mass, the altar is stripped of all cloths, candles, and adornments. Again, our Confirmation students serve our community by carrying out each item, including the large cross behind the altar, to be held elsewhere until the celebration of the Resurrection at the Easter Vigil. Our altar area is left barren, a stark reminder of the tomb in which Jesus was laid on Friday. We follow Fr. Ernest and Deacon Chris in solemn

procession to Condon Hall, where the reserved Eucharist will lie in repose. All are welcome to stay for a time of adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. In the Passion Gospel, we hear Jesus asking his disciples – and now he asks us – to “stay here and keep watch.” We keep vigil during this solemn night, anticipating the events of Jesus’s arrest, crucifixion, and death.

Good Friday – This day is different from all other days in the year. It is the only day when there is no Mass, no consecration of the Eucharist. Mass is fundamentally a celebration of Resurrection, and on this day, we commemorate Jesus’s crucifixion and death. This liturgy is solemn and simple, beginning with the Liturgy of the Word, including the reading of the Passion. The word “passion” comes from the Latin for “suffering,” which is why we call this time in Jesus’s life his Passion. (A related word is “compassion,” which means to “suffer with” another.) Then we pray the Solemn Intercessions. These ancient prayers of the Church offer intercession for people in all walks of life and circumstances; we exercise our baptismal priesthood by offering prayers for the good of all humankind. In saying these prayers, we are reminded that Jesus’s sacrifice was not just for us, but for all the world and for all time. Following the prayers, we have an opportunity to venerate the cross; by bowing, kneeling, or touching the cross, we honor it as the symbol of Christ’s sacrifice and the instrument of our salvation. We offer our awe and our veneration as inadequate thanks for all that Christ has done for us. Then we are invited to receive communion. Although there is no consecration, we are not separated from this spiritual nourishment, even as we remember and reflect on Jesus’ suffering and death. As the liturgy ends, we are sent forth in silence to continue our meditation on Christ’s suffering and death.

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Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday – This is it! The big day! This feast is what defines us as Christians and links us to one another and to our Trinitarian God. It’s all about RESURRECTION!

If you have never attended an Easter Vigil Mass, please consider being part of this beautiful celebration this year. It is a liturgy full of drama and meaning, light and dark, salvation and hope, gratitude and celebration. It is filled with the ancient movements and symbols of our faith as we gather to thank God for the vastness of the Divine Love for us and for all creation. All five of our senses are fully engaged as we see the Easter candle, the flames, the procession; we smell the incense and the perfume of the Easter flowers; we hear the Word of God and the music that expresses our longing and joy; we touch the water and the candle wax and one another’s hands in the sign of peace; we taste the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist. The intensity of our experience in this liturgy is unmatched by any other.

The Vigil begins in front of the church, in darkness. From the darkness arises the Easter fire, which is blessed and then spreads the good news of the resurrection, flame to flame and heart to heart. We process into the tomb of the darkened church, a reminder of Christ’s Passion and death, where our candles flicker and give hope. The Exultet sings out our praise of God for God’s wondrous deeds for us. The readings lead us through salvation history, from creation to Exodus, to prophecies of the Messiah, to the coming of Christ and his Resurrection. We sing, “Gloria!” and ring our bells because we cannot contain our joy at the news of the Resurrection. The feast of Easter is intimately tied to Baptism, for it is by our Baptism that we become one with Christ in his death and resurrection. The Easter Vigil is one of the celebrations when new believers are invited to join the church; this year, our Elect and Candidates will receive the sacraments at Pentecost, which bookends the feast of Easter and is an equally appropriate time to receive the sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, and First Eucharist). At the Vigil, after asking all the host of heaven to join us in praise when we sing the Litany of the Saints, we renew our baptismal promises and are sprinkled with newly blessed holy water.

Then we turn to the Liturgy of the Eucharist, where the sharing of Christ’s Body and Blood takes on even more potent meaning during this festival day. We are filled with joy and gratitude as we humbly partake of the sacrament of salvation. The Easter Vigil is almost too much to experience and absorb – it can certainly be exhausting – but how else would we praise God for such a wondrous gift as this? God came to us and lived with us, taught us and healed us, suffered and died for us, and rose from the dead so that we, too, will rise with him and join the eternal feast of heaven. This is why our Alleluias return with such joyful abandon at Easter!

On Easter Sunday the joy continues as we welcome, and welcome back, many family members and visitors to our Masses. Many of the parts of the Vigil that speak of Resurrection – the Gloria, the renewal of Baptismal vows, the proclamation of Jesus’s Resurrection, and the celebration of the Eucharist – continue at these Masses. Let us greet one another with the traditional words, “Christ is risen!” and our response, “He is risen indeed! Alleluia!” Easter is so filled with joy that the entire 50-day season is one long celebration of Resurrection. Praise God!