

The Rector's Message: Holy Week and Easter at Holy Trinity

Nearly half of each of the four Gospels in the New Testament is concerned with the events that took place during the last week of our Lord's earthly life, and His resurrection on the third day. This eight-day period is for the Christian the most significant one in all history.

In the worship of the Church, special liturgies have taken shape over the centuries which enable the faithful to participate in some of the intensity of these historical days. This article introduces the most significant of these services as used in our parish. As Fr. John Nicholson wrote in an earlier Holy Week Booklet for Holy Trinity, "Through the liturgies of this week, the rites and ceremonies of the Church, which come from the very earliest times, we act out this drama of our salvation. The following services, with their explanations, will aid our people in their actual and spiritual participation in the Eternal Drama of our Lord Christ."

Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday— 8:00 and 10:30 a.m.

Historically, the Sunday before Easter has had two distinct themes, both of which are included in the liturgy for this day. The central theme is the Passion of Christ. The Gospel during the Mass is a dramatic reading of the Passion, in which the congregation assumes the part of the Crowd. This highlights our recognition that we are numbered among those sinners for whom Christ offered His life. "The reading of the Passion sets the climax upon all Gospel lessons appointed during Lent, bringing us to the ultimate revelation of God's reconciling love in Christ for us sinners and preparing us for the renewal of life offered to all who through faith in Him would die unto sin and arise unto a new life of righteousness." (*The Oxford American Prayer Book Commentary*, M. Shepherd.)

The secondary theme of this day is the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, surrounded by welcoming crowds who lay their branches before Him in honor. In our liturgy, palms are blessed and distributed, after which we imitate the Crowd and process around the church, joining our Hosannas of praise to theirs. Once again, we are brought to an identification with the historical event.

Our lengthy service on the day assists us in our entrance into the solemnities surrounding the drama of Christ's Passion and our redemption.

Maundy Thursday—6:00 p.m.

The ancient tradition of the Church recommends that the celebration of the Holy Eucharist on Maundy Thursday be performed in the evening, in keeping with our Lord's action when instituting the liturgy of His Body and Blood. The Eucharist of Maundy Thursday is sometimes called the "Mass of the Institution of the Lord's Supper".

From an epistle of St. Paul, we read "For in the night in which He was betrayed . . ." Hence, the Eucharist is very properly celebrated in the evening on Thursday of Holy Week, commonly called Maundy Thursday. The Gospel reading from St. John tells of Jesus washing his apostles' feet that same night. Because of this, an optional feature of the liturgy has been a foot-washing ceremony, done following the Gospel and homily. At Holy Trinity, the clergy wash the feet of

twelve representatives of the parish, while the choir sings anthems traditionally used for the occasion.

The Liturgy of the Institution is a Mass celebrated in the accustomed manner. The high altar is vested in white because of the glorious occasion of God's gift to us of the Blessed Sacrament. On the high altar, there are just two Eucharistic lights. The high altar represents the table at which our Lord sat with his disciples in the Upper Room.

Another altar is provided, which is beautifully adorned with white flowers and many candles, and also vested in white. It is called the Altar of Repose, which ceremonially and liturgically represents the Garden of Gethsemane, to which our Lord retired for meditation and prayer after the Institution of the Eucharist. The Eucharist itself begins and is completed in the customary manner, except that more bread than necessary for the Communion will be consecrated, which will be exposed on the Altar of Repose until Noon on Friday, when it will be consumed by those communicants present during the Mass of the Pre-Sanctified.

Good Friday Liturgy—Noon

The Good Friday liturgy is unique in character, recalling the earliest days of the Church. The altar service here presented comes down to us from most ancient forms.

The first portion of the service is the *Liturgy of the Word*. The focal point is the reading of the Passion according to St. John. This has been done since before the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D.

The *Solemn Collects* which follow have been traced in their present form to the time of St. Justin Martyr. He gave his life for our Lord in the second century. These prayers are intercessory, stressing that our Lord's sacrifice is for all people.

The *Veneration of the Cross* comes to us almost unchanged from 4th century Jerusalem. The faithful are invited to acknowledge outwardly the significance of the Cross as the means by which our Lord climaxed His self-oblation for our sakes. The *Reproaches*, read during the Veneration, came down from the 10th century. These consist of verses which set in parallel the Divine compassion for Israel and the outrages inflicted on Christ in His Passion. They are built on Old Testament passages. (The Veneration of the Cross will also be offered at 7:00 p.m. at the conclusion of the *Stations of the Cross*.)

The liturgy concludes with the *Mass of the Pre-Sanctified*. The name derives from the fact that the Host which is consumed during this service was consecrated during the liturgy of Maundy Thursday, and was resting on the Altar of Repose from then until this time. As in medieval times, all the faithful present may receive the Sacrament.

The Great Vigil of Easter—5:30 a.m.

This most solemn liturgy of the Church dates back to earliest Christian times, with documentation showing it to be no later than second century. Taken as a whole, this Vigil provides the most complete expression of the Christian religion of any worship service. The central theme is that of Easter—the miraculous raising of Jesus from the dead, not backwards like Lazarus to this life again, but rather to eternal life, sealing the ultimate victory for us over sin and death. The rising of the Son out of death is represented externally by the rising of the sun out of darkness. Pervading the whole service is the symbolism of the Light of Christ in reference to Baptism and Resurrection.

Originally the Vigil began in the middle of the night and concluded with the first Mass of Easter at dawn. Today, with our somewhat shortened version of the Vigil, the ideal time to begin would

be an hour or so before dawn, thus maintaining the link with the external symbols of darkness and light. With the change for the beginning of Daylight Savings Time, we can now reliably schedule our Vigil to begin at 5:30 a.m. The following notes describe the four parts of the service.

1. The *Lighting of the Paschal Candle* begins the Vigil, as this ancient resurrection symbol shines forth as the only light in the darkness. This section concludes with the chanting of the Exsultet or “Paschal proclamation” which proclaims Christ as the fulfillment of Old Testament revelation.
2. The *Liturgy of the Word or Prophecies* is a succession of Old Testament readings which reveal the foreshadowing of God’s redemptive work.
3. The third part of the liturgy is the Administration of *Holy Baptism*. This service includes the Blessing of the Baptismal Font and concludes with the sprinkling of the congregation with Holy Water in solemn remembrance of their own Baptism.

Baptism is the sacrament of second birth or re-creation in which the candidate “dies to sin” and is “raised to newness of life.” It is thus especially appropriate during the Easter Vigil. In the absence of baptismal candidates, the Font is nonetheless blessed, the congregation renews their baptismal vows, and are then sprinkled with Holy Water in remembrance of their own Baptism.

4. The Holy Eucharist (also offered without the Vigil at 8:00 and 10:30 a.m.) From the exhortation, BCP page 316: “Beloved in the Lord: our Savior Christ, on the night before He suffered, instituted the Sacrament of His Body and Blood as a sign and pledge of His love, for the continual remembrance of the sacrifice of His death, and for a spiritual sharing in His risen life. For in these holy Mysteries we are made one with Christ, and Christ with us; we are made one body in Him, and members one of another.

Having in mind, therefore, His great love for us, and in obedience to His command, His Church renders to Almighty God our heavenly Father never-ending thanks for the creation of the world, for His continual providence over us, for His love for all mankind, and for the redemption of the world by our Savior Christ, who took upon himself our flesh, and humbled himself even to death on the cross, that He might make us the children of God by the power of the Holy Spirit, and exalt us to everlasting life.”

May our participation in Holy Week help prepare us for a most glorious celebration of Easter.

Faithfully yours,

Fr. Lawrence D. Bausch