

A Guide to the Sacred Triduum

From the evening Mass of the Maundy Thursday until Vespers (Evening Prayer) on Easter Sunday afternoon, the Church celebrates a very special period with the ceremonies of the **Sacred Triduum**, which are the three last days of Holy Week: the Rites help us to commemorate our Lord's life, death, and Resurrection.



Maundy Thursday: In Cena Domini Mass (Mass of the Lord's Supper)

This Mass Commemorates Our Lord Last Supper during which Our Lord instituted the Sacraments of Holy Orders and the Blessed Sacrament, while offering the First Mass. The ceremonies can include the *Mandatum* (the Washing of the Feet), the Translation of the Blessed Sacrament to the Altar of Repose for watching with Him until midnight as He asks us again "*will you not watch one hour with Me*" (Matthew 26:40) and the *Dividunt*, the Stripping of the Altars.

Ringling of the Bells

During the "Gloria" which is sung on Holy Thursday, we hear the altar bells ringing! We are celebrating the Mass for the last time until the Easter Vigil, and the Church is in mourning so the bells and organ will remain silent until we sing the "Gloria" again; instead the "crotalus" (meaning "rattle") is used in place of the bells.

Ubi Caritas

The Roman Missal prescribes that we should sing the ancient song "Ubi Caritas" during the Offertory. The words are very meaningful, especially for the Mass of the Lord's Supper. Translated, they mean "Where charity is, God is there". Our Lord gave us a great lesson: He came to serve, not to be served. So, we follow.

Altar of Repose

The Altar of Repose represents Our Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane, and his call for us to make a response to His words, "Could you not watch one hour with me? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." it also reminds us of the prison where our Lord was held. It is also a loving show of affection for Our Lord and His Paschal Sacrifice, and is the place where we make time that evening with Him. The Tabernacle is actually called an Urn it has no veil on it: as already Our Lord is stripped of His garments.

Good Friday

Our Saviours Passion and Death is poignantly observed during the Solemn Afternoon Liturgy which includes the Passion according to St. John, the Great Intercessions, the Showing and Veneration of the Cross followed by Holy Communion.

Prostration

The solemn Liturgy (not Mass) of the Lord's Passion begins in silence to mark the sorrowful solemnity of the day. The priests prostrate themselves and pray in silence for a while, and the congregation kneel. This signifies both the abasement of earthly man, and also the grief and sorrow of the Church. The thought of our crucified Lord should bring us to the lowest place in adoration of Him, who for our salvation "humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross." (Philippians 2:8)

The Solemn Intercessions of Good Friday

The Church specifies that the solemn intercessions of Good Friday are to follow the "wording and form handed down by ancient tradition, maintaining the full range of intentions, so as to signify clearly the universal effect of the Passion of Christ, who hung on the Cross for the salvation of the whole world." The ten intercessions are thus offered in an order which spreads a progressively wider net, recognizing the catholicity of Christ's sacrifice: we pray for (1) the Church, (2) the pope, (3) the clergy and lay ministers, (4) catechumens, (5) all Christians, (6) the Jews, (7) those who do not believe in Christ, (8) those who do not believe in God, (9) those in public office, and (10) those in tribulation

Veneration of the Cross

Egeria, a holy women, recorded her pilgrimage to the Holy Land about 381/2–386, where she describes veneration of the True Cross of Christ in Jerusalem. The Crucifix is unveiled to show us our Lord's redeeming death, & the salvation given to the whole world. The priest removes his shoes & vestments to venerate, and then all the people approach the cross to kneel before it to touch the Cross with a kiss.

Holy Saturday

What is happening today? Today there is a great silence over the Earth, a great silence, and stillness, a great silence because the King sleeps; the Earth was in terror, and was still, because God slept in the flesh and raised up those who were sleeping from the ages. God has died in the flesh, and the underworld has trembled. (*Extracts from an ancient Homily for Holy Saturday*)

The Easter Vigil in the Holy Night

Holy Saturday proceeds with the Vigil Mass celebrating Our Divine Lord's Resurrection—the blessing of the Paschal Fire and Candle, the *Exsultet*, the four Lessons of the Old and New Testament, Litany of the Saints, blessing of the Easter and Baptismal Water, baptisms (if any), blessing of the baptismal font and renewal of the baptismal promises. All of this is then followed by the Easter Vigil Mass wherein "*Alleluia*" is triumphantly chanted thrice—the first time this phrase meaning "*Praise the Lord*" has been uttered since the start of Lent.

Easter Fire

The fire, made of dry wood, begins the liturgy of the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday. It represents Christ's resurrection. Christ dispels the darkness by His victory over sin and death.

Paschal Candle

The new paschal candle is then brought to the priest, where he marks it by cutting a cross into it and forming the Greek letters Alpha at the top of the cross, and Omega at the bottom. He then inserts the numbers of the year, 2024, between the arms of the cross. During this carving he says these extraordinary words that encapsulate the entire Paschal Mystery, "Christ yesterday and today, the Beginning and the End, the Alpha and the Omega. All time belongs to him and all the ages. To him be glory and power through every age and for ever. Amen." Five grains of incense, commemorating the Five Wounds of Christ, may then be inserted into the candle in the form of a cross.

Easter Carols

We associate carols with songs of praise and honour of the Nativity of our Blessed Lord, yet the glorious feast of Easter, the feast of His Resurrection, also lays claim to many carols to sing His Easter Praises!