

WHAT IS HOLY WEEK?

- The holiest week of the year! We enter into the last days of Christ on earth leading up to his crucifixion, burial, and resurrection.
- Lent is coming to a close, but Holy Week intensifies as we near Good Friday, and ends in great rejoicing at the Easter Vigil and on Easter Sunday.
- *To enter into the mysteries that are presented to us in so many tangible and spiritual ways this week, set aside more time to be quiet and reflect on what you hear, see, and experience. Even if it is 5 extra minutes at the end of the day, the Lord is already there to meet us and enlighten us. What is the Lord showing you this Holy Week?*

PALM SUNDAY

- Palm Sunday begins with the commemoration of Christ coming triumphantly into Jerusalem; we start in the narthex, listening to the Gospel story of this entry, and process into the nave, reenacting the procession into the city.
- Riding a donkey and the way people welcomed Jesus with palm branches and laying their cloaks down on the dusty road was how kings and highly respected people entered cities and were greeted in those days.
 - o The Old Testament prophecies were also fulfilled on this day:
 - “Exult greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout for joy, O daughter Jerusalem! Behold: your king is coming to you, a just savior is he, Humble, and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” (Zechariah 9:9)
- Later in the liturgy, a Passion narrative is proclaimed from one of the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke; synoptic means they sync with each other)
 - o *We all participate, drawing our hearts and minds to the reality that our sins, our real personal sins, were the cause of so much suffering for Christ. It is difficult to say those words, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” but do not deny the reality that he died for you. Even as you say those words, you console Christ with your contrition for your sins. No act of consolation, however small, is ever rejected by Him Who loves you more than you could ever know.*
- Saint Bernard of Clairvaux offered a homily about the significance of Palm Sunday and the account of Christ’s entry into Jerusalem:
 - o “How different the cries, ‘Away with him, away with him, crucify him,’ and then, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, hosanna, in the highest!’ How different the cries that now are calling him ‘King of Israel’ and then in a few days’ time will be saying, ‘We have no king but Caesar!’ What a contrast between the green branches and the cross, between the flowers and the thorns! Before they were offering their own clothes for him to walk upon, and so soon afterwards they are stripping him of his, and casting lots upon them.”
- *Palms from Palm Sunday are burned the next year for Ash Wednesday; they are blessed! Keep them safe and display them somewhere in your home as a sign of your faith and a reminder of Christ’s Kingship in your life and His Sacrifice for you.*

MONDAY OF HOLY WEEK

- **Fig Monday**

- The Gospel at daily Mass (Mark 11:12-25) tells of **Jesus cursing a fig tree, flipping tables, driving people out of the temple with a whip, and teaching his disciples about prayer under the now withered fig tree.** What is happening??
- In the Old Testament, “**figs are symbols of abundance.** They represent a people who are thriving...Adam and Eve wore fig leaves on their way out of Eden after they had sinned.” There is mention of figs in the New Testament as well.
- If figs represent the abundance of the Kingdom of God, that’s why fig leaves protect Adam and Eve even in their disgrace, and why Nathaniel being near one is a sign that he is primed and ready to meet the Savior, or why St. John equates the falling of the fig to the end of the world.”
- The story of the cleansing of the temple thrown in between the encounter with the fig tree interprets the fig tree lesson:
 - “**...if we are feeling the frustration of a fruitless prayer life, and when we struggle to be consistent and dedicated in our spiritual devotion, St. Mark has a proposal – invite Christ in to do a housecleaning.** On our own, we are like Adams and Eves fleeing the wreckage of our bad choices and delayed promises. We clutch our fig branches on the way out of paradise. Our continued excuses are harmful and condemn us to spiritual barrenness. We feel the weight of those excuses and they bring us to a halt before we even begin to try. But it doesn’t have to be this way.
 - The only solution is to place Christ back at the center. Allow him to pray in us. We’ve been trying to do it on our own for so long, and it isn’t working. Allow Christ in to remove all the what-ifs and dreams untried so that he can become a new, strong tree of life growing within.”
- Taken from: <https://aleteia.org/2025/04/13/why-holy-week-has-fig-monday> from Fr. Michael Rennie
- *This is a call to intensify and deepen our prayer life, and as we said, we can’t do it alone. How can you let Christ open you up and clean out what is bad and unnecessary in your heart?*

TUESDAY OF HOLY WEEK

- **Chrism Mass** (called for on the morning of Holy Thursday, but often moved to Tuesday)
 - All the priests of the diocese are there with the bishop, and they all renew their priestly promises and celebrate Mass together
 - The Oil of the Sick, Oil of Catechumens, and Sacred Chrism are all blessed (OS, OC) and consecrated (SC) by the bishop
 - Oil of the Sick: used in the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick
 - Oil of Catechumens: used in the Sacrament of Baptism
 - Sacred Chrism: used in the Sacraments of Confirmation and Ordination, and in consecrating churches, and blessings of altars and vessels used at Mass
 - <https://www.simplycatholic.com/what-are-holy-oils/>
 - Find the oils in the ambry, close to the baptismal font.

- *All of the priests coming together with the bishop, and faithful from all over the Diocese is a great sign of unity – unity under the mission of Christ Himself. Just as people coming together shows unity of heart, the oils are essential to the sacraments, making visible the invisible realities God enacts on our souls. What do you remember of the sacraments you have received (or what excites you most about receiving them if you have not yet)? Take time to reflect on the baptismal vows we (or our parent) took, and the renewal of these at our Confirmation.*

WEDNESDAY OF HOLY WEEK

- **Spy Wednesday** is so named because we remember when **Judas Iscariot**, one of the 12, betrayed Christ, going to the chief priests in secret to agree to help them arrest Jesus. He was given 30 pieces of silver for his cooperation.
- Matthew 26:14-16, Mark 14:10-11, Luke 22:3-6
- **Tenebrae Services**
 - Tenebrae: Latin for “shadows” or “darkness”
 - **Scripture** from the Office of Readings and Morning Prayer are read, chanted, or sung
 - Psalms and the Book of Lamentations draw us into the emotional distress of Christ and his followers and the weight of his sacrifice.
 - Passages from the Gospels of events leading up to Christ’s crucifixion show how the prophecies are fulfilled and bring the Passion to center focus.
 - **Candles** are extinguished one by one as the readings are read or sung, symbolizing the diminishing light of Christ in the world. The triangular candelabrum, a “hearse,” holds 14 or 15 candles.
 - **Strepitus**: At the end, the last candle is either extinguished or taken away and hidden, leaving the faithful in darkness, and a loud noise, a “strepitus,” is made, representing the “chaos and violence of Christ’s arrest and the earthquake that followed his death. It can also symbolize the shattering of the old order.”
- *We are so close to the Triduum now. Prepare your hearts in reverent quiet, listening in the dark for the whispers of God’s love and hope even as we remember our own betrayals of Christ.*

WHAT IS THE TRIDUUM?

- Sundown Holy Thursday to sundown Easter Day is the Triduum (Latin for “three days”)
 - More details about how the “three days” are calculated here:
<https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/resource/55487/an-introduction-to-the-holy-week>
- This is ONE MASS spread over three days – from sundown Holy Thursday through the Easter Vigil – and this is the most solemn (read: highest point) of the Church year. *How will you observe it, even if you can’t make it to every liturgy?*

HOLY THURSDAY – ENTERING INTO THE LAST SUPPER AND CHRIST’S AGONY

- Mass commemorates the Last Supper
 - o **The Institution of the Eucharist** (Christ turns the bread and wine into His Body and Blood)
 - In the feast of Passover, which He was celebrating with His disciples at this Last Supper, there are four cups of wine to drink throughout the meal. Christ stops and does not drink the final cup of wine...until He is on the Cross, and he says “I thirst,” then takes the gall they give him, then declares, “It is accomplished.” The sacrifice is not complete until He has partaken of the fourth cup. (See *The Fourth Cup* by Scott Hahn)
 - o **The (beginning of the) Institution of the Priesthood** (feet washing was part of how a new priest was consecrated) – see John 13 – “St. John is mystical and sacramental, and there is often more going on underneath the textual surface than is obvious at first.... this is something of great importance, so much so that, Jesus says, if St. Peter refuses to be a participant in the ritual, he can have “no part” in Jesus.”
 - **Feet washing in the old testament was related to priests preparing to offer atonement sacrifices and also married couples preparing for the marital embrace.**
 - “It was the High Priest who was to wash Himself before the sacrifice; the fact that it is not Jesus who is washed, but rather His disciples, strongly encourages the interpretation that it is by having their feet washed that they come to share in the priesthood of Christ.”
 - catholicexchange.com/the-footwashing-ritual-and-the-sacrament-of-holy-orders-a-new-look-at-john-13/
- **The washing of feet** has multiple layers. It is often celebrated at Mass with the washing of people’s feet, remembering how Christ washed the twelve’s feet as an example of **how we are to serve others**. And by virtue of our baptism, we are priests, too – not ordained priests, but priests in the sense of offering our entire lives to God.
- At the end of Mass, there is a **procession of the Blessed Sacrament from the main altar to the “altar of repose”** which symbolizes Christ going out to the Garden of Gethsemane, where he experienced his agony before being arrested. (Matthew 26:36-46, Mark 14:32-42, Luke 22:39-46)
 - o Note there is no final blessing before the procession – the liturgy continues...
 - o **Adoration** continues here until midnight
 - o **We keep watch with Jesus**, as he asked his disciples to, with him in the garden
 - o Many people participate in a **seven churches pilgrimage** during this adoration, visiting seven churches’ altars of repose and remembering the seven stops Christ made that night and into the morning of Good Friday (the garden, the high priests, Pilate, Herod, etc.)
 - o At midnight, **the Blessed Sacrament is taken and hidden** in a tabernacle away from the sanctuary and nave.
 - Christ in the Blessed Sacrament will not be present in the church’s regular tabernacle until the Easter Vigil, and there will be no Adoration in the chapel during this time.

- *It is moving to sit in front of the empty and open tabernacle in the church on Good Friday and Holy Saturday. If you can, make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament chapel and spend some time sitting in silent hope.*

GOOD FRIDAY – MOURNING OUR LORD AND STANDING WITH OUR LADY

- Matthew 27:1-66, Mark 15:1-47, Luke 23:1-56, John 18:28-19:42
- **A day of fasting and abstinence**, marking the great solemnity of Christ's death
- Noon – **Stations of the Cross**
 - **Why noon?** John [19:14](#) says Christ was sentenced to be crucified at noon; [Mark 15:25](#) has Jesus crucified "at the third hour," which means either 9 A.M. or the period from 9 to 12. Noon, the time when, according to John, Jesus was sentenced to death, was **the hour at which the priests began to slaughter Passover lambs in the temple** (footnote of the New American Bible, see USCCB online)
- 3pm – **The Commemoration of the Lord's Passion**
 - **At the stroke of 3pm, the time that Christ is said to have died on the cross**, the priests, deacons, and sometimes altar servers will lie prostrate (face down) on the floor facing the sanctuary and altar while the faithful kneel in silence. This takes place in place of an entrance procession (remember, one continuous liturgy)
 - **The Passion according to St. John** is always the version of the Passion read on Good Friday (the others cycle through on Palm Sunday in years A, B, and C)
 - **Veneration of the Cross**
 - A cross, or crucifix, is brought into the sanctuary. The faithful approach it to venerate it, remembering Christ's death for each of them. **You may reverence the cross with a kiss, a touch, a bow, a genuflection...**
 - **"The Good Friday Reproaches** are a series of antiphons that recall the rejection and betrayal of Christ by his people. They are chanted during the adoration of the cross..."
 - **Extended Prayers of the Faithful**
 - We pray more fervently for mercy and for help and graces for ourselves and others in need
 - **Communion Service:** This is NOT another Mass; it is a continuation of the Triduum
 - **This is a continuation of the Mass**
 - The consecrated hosts we receive on Good Friday were consecrated on Holy Thursday
 - The Blessed Sacrament we adored the night before and they took away and hid is brought out for us to receive
 - **We leave in silence;** no final blessing...the Triduum continues...
- **Service of Shadows** – see Tenebrae on Spy Wednesday; some churches hold this service on Friday evening; Tenebrae services traditionally include Holy Thursday and Good Friday Liturgy of the Hours readings

HOLY SATURDAY – WAITING IN SILENT HOPE

- The Office of Readings includes “**an ancient homily**” that describes Christ’s “harrowing of hell” or descent into hell to **retrieve the souls of the righteous** (Adam, Eve, Abraham, St. Joseph...) who died before Christ but could not enter heaven yet.
 - o It begins: *What is happening? 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. Truly he goes to seek out our first parent like a lost sheep; he wishes to visit those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. He goes to free the prisoner Adam and his fellow-prisoner Eve from their pains, he who is God, and Adam's son.*
- **The church is prepared for Easter**
- Our baskets of food to be shared the next day at Easter feasts are blessed (see traditional Easter basket contents page)
- The tomb is shut; the disciples are hiding and praying; Mary is full of grief but also of anticipation...
- Then the sun sets...

EASTER VIGIL – THE PINNACLE OF THE CHURCH’S CELEBRATIONS

General:

- On Saturday morning, we reflect in silence because Christ is in his tomb. He is descending into Hell to raise up the dead into new life.
- The vigil is an encounter with Jesus. It is the final result of an epic battle between God and Satan, between light and darkness, life and death.
 - o In the Gospel of John, after washing the disciples feet, Jesus explains what will happen next to His disciples. He says “**I am going where you cannot follow me now, later on you shall come after me**” and Peter says “why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you”.
 - o Jesus explains and says “**Do not be distressed or fearful, as you have hear me say ‘I go away for a while, and I come back to you’**”. In a few moments He then says in John, “**I shall not go on speaking to you any longer; the Prince of the world is at hand. He has no hold on me, but the world must know that I love the Father and do as the Father has commanded me. Come, then! Let us be on our way**” John 15:29-30
 - o He chose the most horrific death for us, and although He experienced agony and extreme stress, He is the utmost example of overcoming the flesh. This is the moment He came for, to destroy sin.
- The whole vigil is like a crescendo, building the anticipation for Christ’s resurrection
- We start with the blessed fire outside, which is representative of the light of Christ. Christ is the light of the world, in a supernatural way as well.
- Paschal Candle:

- A very old tradition. St. Jerome writes about it in 384 AD. St. Augustine mentions it in early 5th century. There is written of a paschal candle in 1517 which was 36 feet tall.
- The Paschal candle represents the risen Christ. There are special prayers over the candle declaring Christ to be the beginning and the end, the alpha and the omega, to show that all time belongs to Him.
- Great Service of Light (sacrum lucernarium):
 - The Deacon enters the church and chants the “Lumen Christi”, light of Christ, three times.
 - The candles we hold represent the light of Christ placed in our hearts at baptism.
 - The candles are all lit from the blessed fire because it symbolizes that all light comes from Christ only.
 - And he places the paschal candle on a stand to be incensed. Then he sings the exultet.
- Exultet:
 - “O charity beyond all telling, to ransom a slave you gave away your Son..... O truly necessary sin of Adam destroyed completely by the Death of Christ....”
 - “O happy fault that earned so great, so glorious a Redeemer.... O truly blessed night, worthy alone to know the time and hour when Christ rose from the underworld!”
 - The deep mystical grace of this hymn lies in the way it draws a contrast between darkness and light in a poetic fashion.
- 7 readings
 - **(Creation)** Genesis 1:1 – 2:2: In the beginning....
 - Genesis 22:1 – 18 Abaham and the Sacrifice of Isaac
 - Exodus 14:15 – 15:1 Crossing the Red Sea
 - **(Calling Creation to himself)** Isaiah 54:5 – 14 Prophecy of God saving His People
 - Isaiah 55:1 – 11 God’s promise to renew his people with an everlasting covenant
 - Baruch 3:9 – 15, 32 – 4:4 Calling on Israel to turn back to the Lord
 - Ezekiel 36:16 – 17a, 18 – 28 God will save His people; sprinkle clean water upon you and give you a new heart and spirit.
 - Glory to God in the Highest
 - Romans 6:3 – 11 Die to sin in the waters of baptism and rise again in Christ Jesus.
 - **Alleluia**
 - A special one only sung at the Easter vigil with three verses. This is because the Easter Vigil is the Sunday of Sundays.
 - It gets louder and louder throughout the song. On theme with the anticipation of the resurrection
 - Luke 24:1 – 12 Empty Tomb: Resurrection of Christ
- Then we have readings from the new testament.

- St. Paul “Romans were indeed buried with him through baptism into death so that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father we too might live in newness of life”
- After the homily, the elect will be called forward and will process to the baptismal font during the Litany of Saints led around the church by the Paschal candle. The candle will be used to bless the baptismal waters.
- Creation:
- First reading - Genesis
 - “Let there be light”, into the darkness
 - Out of the chaos, God creates. Creation is good, God says “and it was good”
- In our baptism we are created new. Baptism is the way new creation happens in us. When we are baptized, we die to our flesh, and our soul is completely transformed. We are a new creation
- Baptism:
- Renewing baptismal vows
- St. Paul tells us we are “baptized into Christ” (Gal. 3:26-27). Galatians 3:26-27, “for as many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”
 - The beginning of Romans 6 says, “Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”
 - Baptism became effective when Christ rose from the dead, as such we are united with his death and resurrection when we die to our flesh and rise out of the water with new life.
 - <https://www.catholic.com/qa/baptism-before-the-resurrection>
 - These are probably reasons why adult baptism only takes place at the Easter Vigil
- Just as the pillar of fire protected the Israelites, allowing their escape to freedom through the parted Red Sea, the Paschal flame stands guard as the holy waters are symbolically parted: the priest blows over the water’s surface, foreshadowing the redemptive qualities of the Sacrament of Baptism.
- Font has eight sides to symbolize the resurrection that Jesus rose on the eighth day.