

AFRICA
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Special Issue

The Holy Week



The Holy Week

Holy Week is the most solemn and glorious week in Christianity, the pinnacle of the liturgical year. It commemorates the final week of Our Lord's life on earth. Holy Week begins with Palm Sunday: Jesus made his final entrance into Jerusalem. It culminates with Easter Sunday. It has in it the "Paschal or Sacred Triduum".

The Sacred Triduum

Sundown on Holy Thursday to sundown on Easter Sunday is considered the most solemn part of the liturgical year. This three-day period is referred to as the *Easter Triduum*, also known as the *Sacred Triduum*, or *Paschal Triduum*: Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday. The word «triduum» comes from the Latin word triduum, which comes from tris ["three"] + dies ["day"].

Basically, the Sacred Triduum is one great festival recounting the last three days of Jesus' life on earth, the events of his Passion and Resurrection, when the **Lamb of God** laid down his life in atonement for our sins.

It is known as the «Paschal Mystery» because it is the ultimate fulfilment of the ancient Jewish Passover (or Pasch), which itself was a recollection of how God brought the Jews out of their slavery in Egypt.

The spotless lamb was slaughtered at the Passover meal and consumed that same night the destroying angel «passed over» the homes marked with the blood of the Passover Lamb,



and those covered by the Blood were saved. This was the Old Testament prefigurement of Jesus' work at the Last Supper—where he inserted himself as the Paschal Lamb—and Calvary, where the sacrifice was offered to save us from our slavery to sin. With the Holy Eucharist, we consume the victim that died for our sins.

The Paschal Mystery is, therefore, God's plan of redemption for the fallen human race through the passion, death, and resurrection of the God-man Jesus Christ. It is one marvellous event stretched out over three days.

Here is a breakdown of each of the three days that make up the **Easter Triduum**:



Holy Thursday

The evening Mass on Holy Thursday is referred to as *The Mass of the Lord's Supper*. This is where the Church relives the institution of the Eucharist and the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass at the Last Supper, as well as the institution of the priesthood, which took place the evening before Jesus was crucified.

After the homily there is an optional «washing of the feet» ceremony, where the priest washes the feet of others to signify his role as servant, just as Jesus did with his disciples. Extra hosts are consecrated at this Mass to be used on Good Friday when no Mass will be celebrated.

The Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday concludes with a procession of the Blessed Sacrament to the «altar of repose,» a place where the consecrated Host is kept, away from the main altar where Mass is normally celebrated.

Many parishes will create space for people to stay and pray with the reposed Eucharist at this altar of repose late into the night, remembering Jesus' request in the Garden of Gethsemane for someone to «watch and pray» with Him.

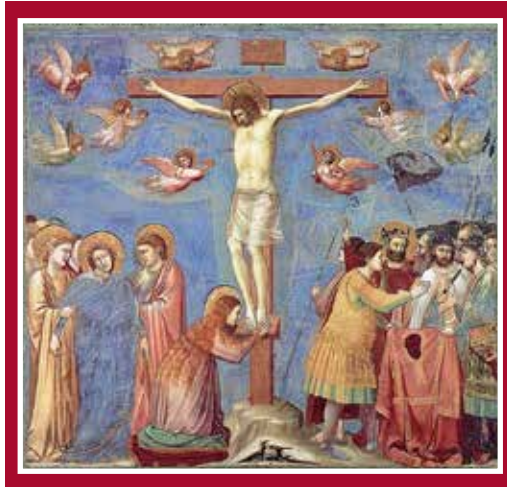




Good Friday

Good Friday is a mandatory day of fasting and abstinence. This is the day of the crucifixion, the day Jesus died for the sins of the world.

The parish altar looks very different on Good Friday: it is plain and bare. There is no consecrated Host in the tabernacle at the main altar of the church; it was carried away on Holy Thursday night to the «altar of repose» to signify Jesus' death. The candle by the tabernacle is blown out, and the tabernacle doors are left open to show that it is empty. Jesus is gone. This is quite dramatic, reminding us that Good Friday is a solemn day of mourning and prayer.



The ceremony on Good Friday is not a Mass. It is a communion service using the consecrated hosts from Holy Thursday. Good Friday is the only day of the year on which no Masses are offered.

These Good Friday services often take place at 3 p.m., the hour that Jesus breathed his last on the cross. Often the priest will begin the service by prostrating himself in front of the altar. Veneration of the Cross usually takes place at this service, in which the priest and the faithful kneel before a cross and kiss it.

Holy Saturday

On this day, Christ is in the tomb.

There is no daytime Mass on Holy Saturday. It is still a day of fasting and sorrow before the Easter Vigil begins that evening. We recall, with Mary and the disciples, that Jesus died and was separated from them for the first time as He lay in the tomb. The faithful often continue their Good Friday fast through Holy Saturday.

In the Apostles Creed we pray «He descended into hell» which describes what Jesus did in the time between his burial and Resurrection. Jesus descended to the realm of the dead on Holy Saturday to save the righteous who died before his crucifixion.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* calls Jesus' descent into the realm of the dead «the last phase of Jesus' messianic mission,» during which he «opened heaven's gates for the just who had gone before him.» Before Holy Saturday, there were no souls enjoying the beatific vision of God in heaven!

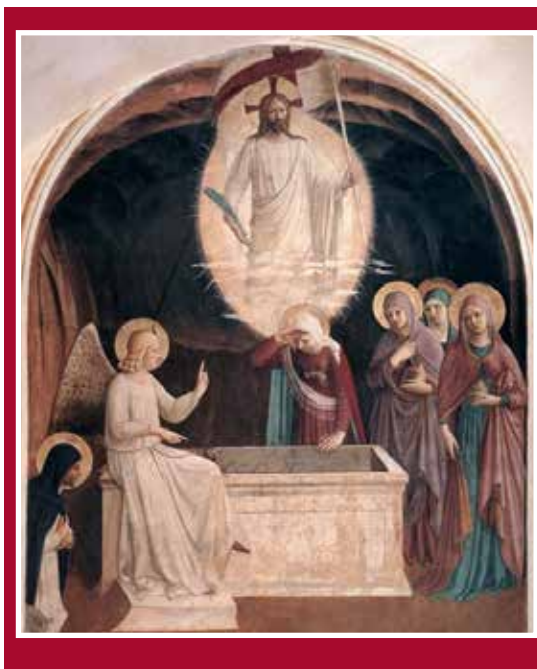


Easter Vigil/ Easter Sunday

A vigil Mass is held after nightfall on Holy Saturday, or before dawn on Easter Sunday, in celebration of the resurrection of Jesus. This is called the Easter Vigil: the most glorious, beautiful, and dramatic liturgy for the Church.

The vigil is divided into four parts and can last up to three hours:

1. The Service of Light
2. The Liturgy of the Word
3. The Liturgy of Baptism
4. The Liturgy of the Eucharist



This is also the Mass in which many catechumens are brought into full communion with the Catholic Church.

Easter Sunday

Easter Sunday is what we've all been waiting for! The forty days of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving during Lent was in preparation for this day, when our hearts and souls can drink in deeply the culmination of the Paschal mystery: **The Resurrection of the Lord.**



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