



SUNDAY REFLECTION

Let us spread before the Lord's feet, not garments or dead branches, which delight the eye for a few hours and then wither. Let us rather spread ourselves, clothed in His grace, or rather, clothed completely in Him. We who have been baptized into Christ must ourselves be the garments that we spread before Him. Now that the crimson stains of our sins have been washed away in the saving waters of Baptism and we have become white as pure wool, let us present the conqueror of death, not just branches of palm but the real rewards of His victory. Let us join today in the children's holy song: 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the king of Israel.' (St. Andrew of Crete)

STEWARDSHIP: In the Gospel story of the first Palm Sunday, we hear that the owners of the ass had only to be told, "The Master has need of it," to give the animal gladly. Do I give as readily to the Lord's work?



READINGS

HOLY THURSDAY

Ex. 12:1-8; 11-14: The Lord gives Moses instructions how to prepare for the Passover.

1 Cor. 11:23-26: Paul tells his converts at Corinth how the Lord at the final meal with His disciples took bread and wine and blessed them, commanding them to do this in His memory.

Jn. 13:1-15: When He washed their feet, Christ gave His disciples an example of self-less love and service.

GOOD FRIDAY

Isa. 52:13-53:12: Isaiah's poignant portrait of the Servant of God points us towards Jesus, the Crucified Messiah.

Heb. 4:14-16; 5:7-9: In the darkness of His Passion, Jesus prays with trust to His Father.

Jn. 18:1-19:42: Jesus in the Gospel of John is a suffering King.

HOLY SATURDAY

Gen. 1:1-2:2: In the dark before creation, God began to form His creation. It is His first gift to us and in it, we see reflected His face.

Gen. 22:1-18: Like Abraham, God did not refuse to offer in sacrifice the only son whom he loved who went to Calvary carrying the wood on which he was to be offered.

Ex. 14:15-15: In God's people passing through the Red Sea we see a symbol of Christ's passage through death and our passage through the waters of Baptism.

Is. 54:5-14: The redeemer of Israel promises to make a new and unshakeable covenant with the people. The Church, the spouse of Christ, is the new Israel.

Is. 55:1-11: God calls on all who wish to be saved to come to Him, for He will make an unbreakable covenant with them, and His word is sure.

Bar. 3:9-15, 32-4:4: God shows His wisdom in revealing Himself to the people; thus to abandon God means spiritual death.

Ezek. 36:16-18: For the sake of His own glory, God will make a new covenant with the people, purifying them and making them new. This purification in water points to the gift of Baptism.

Rom. 6:3-11: Paul reminds us how we went into the waters of baptism and came out into the new life of Christ.

Lk. 24:1-12: The women who come to anoint the body of Jesus are asked: 'Why do you seek the living among the dead?'

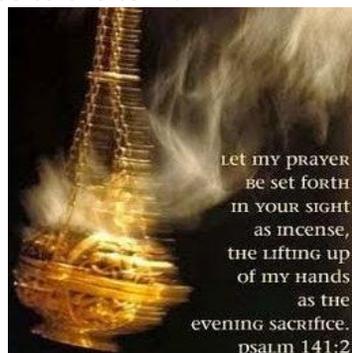
EASTER SUNDAY

Acts 10:34, 37-43: This is an account of the first time the Gospel was preached to people who were not Jews. They may have heard something about Jesus but the Good News is that He has been raised from the dead.

Col. 3:1-4: Paul reminds the disciples how radically their lives have been altered by Baptism. The same is true for us and for all who were baptized at the Easter Vigil.

1 Cor. 5:6-8: At Passover time, a Jewish home was cleansed of old leaven. For Paul this is a symbol of how we are cleansed from all that is sinful by the sacrament of Baptism.

Jn. 20:1-9: Mary Magdalene discovers the tomb of Jesus is empty and she brings the news to His disciples who race to the tomb.



USE OF INCENSE DURING HOLY WEEK AND THROUGH THE EASTER SEASON:

As we enter into Holy Week and the Easter Season incense will once again become prevalent in our liturgical celebrations.

The use of incense during the liturgies of Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, the Easter Vigil and each of the Masses of Easter Sunday with the exception of the Mass celebrated at 8:30 a.m. as a symbol for our prayers rising up to God (Ps. 141:2) is an important part of our Judeo-Christian heritage. It is understood, however, that for some people this presents a health concern.

On **Holy Thursday**, during the Mass of the Lord's Supper, incense will be used during the Presentation of the Gifts as part of the Eucharistic Preparation (after the Liturgy of the Word and the homily have finished). It will be used again at the end of the liturgy during the Transfer of the Eucharist.

During the **Easter Vigil Mass**, incense will be used during the opening procession, at the reading of the Gospel and during the Presentation of the Gifts (which follows the homily).

On **Easter Sunday**, incense will be used at the 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. Masses at the beginning of the Mass to reverence the altar, at the proclamation of the Gospel to reverence the Gospel Book, and at the Presentation of the Gifts if there are Censer Bearers present.

Incense will not be used during the Good Friday liturgy or the 6:30 a.m. and 8:30 a.m. Masses of Easter Sunday.



HOLY WEEK ITS ORIGINS AND SIGNIFICANCE:

Holy Week stands at the head of our calendar, the holiest week of the entire liturgical year. Holy Week begins on Palm Sunday and continues until Easter Sunday. It celebrates the Paschal Mystery, the passion and death of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and His victorious resurrection, His triumph over sin and death and His glorification by His Father.

History

Holy Week observances began in Jerusalem in the earliest days of the Church, when devout people traveled to Jerusalem at Passover to reenact the events of the week leading up to the Resurrection.

Egeria was a Christian who traveled widely during the period of 381-385 and wrote about Christian customs and observances in Egypt, Palestine, and Asia Minor. She described how religious tourists to Jerusalem reenacted the events of Holy Week. On Palm Sunday afternoon, the crowds waved palm fronds as they made a procession from the Mount of Olives into the city. Of course, the observances must have begun quite a number of years before Egeria witnessed them, or they wouldn't have been so elaborate. It's just that Egeria's description is

the earliest we still have. The tourists took the customs home with them. Holy week observances spread to Spain by the fifth century, to Gaul and England by the early seventh century. They didn't spread to Rome until the twelfth century.

The purpose of Holy Week is to reenact, relive, and participate in the passion of Jesus Christ. Holy Week is the same in the eastern and western Church, but because eastern Christians use the Julian Calendar to calculate Easter, the celebrations occur at different times. However, the following events in the week before Easter are the same, east and west, relative to the date of Easter:

- **Palm Sunday** (or Passion Sunday), the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem.
- **Holy Thursday** (or Maundy Thursday), the institution of Communion and the betrayal by Judas.
- **Good Friday**, the arrest, trial, crucifixion, death, and burial of Jesus Christ.
- **Holy Saturday**, the Sabbath on which Jesus rested in the grave.

Reconstructing the Holy Week from Scripture

Friday: Preparation Day, the Passover

The disciples arranged for the Passover meal, which took place after sundown on Thursday. We might call it Friday Eve, because by Jewish reckoning, the day begins with the previous sunset. That's why we call 24 December "Christmas Eve." Jesus and the disciples ate the Passover in the upper room. They ate it early, which was not uncommon. In that era, most Passover Seders did not include lamb, because most Jews lived too far away from the Temple to obtain a lamb that was kosher for Passover. Therefore the disciples, who were from Galilee, would have been accustomed to a Passover Seder without lamb. Judas left during the meal. Jesus and the remaining disciples adjourned to the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed and the disciples kept falling asleep. Judas arrived to betray Jesus, who spent the rest of the night being tried by the Sanhedrin and by Pilate. The following morning, which was still the same day by Jewish reckoning, the Crucifixion significantly took place just as the Passover lambs were being slaughtered in the Temple. Matthew 27:62, Mark 15:42, Luke 23:55-56, and John 19:31 all inform us that this took place on Preparation Day, which is the Jewish name for Friday. Mark and John explain that the next day was the Sabbath. Later the disciples realized that in giving them the bread and pronouncing it His body, Jesus Himself had been the Passover lamb at the Last Supper. Thus Jesus, our Passover lamb, was sacrificed for our sins on Passover (1 Cor. 5:7), and His blood protects us from the angel of death. Jesus died on the cross and was buried before sunset. So Friday was first day that Jesus lay in the tomb.

Saturday: the Jewish Sabbath

Jesus rested in the tomb on the Sabbath. According to Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:1-3, and Luke 23:56-24:3, the day before the Resurrection was a Sabbath. This is the second day that Jesus lay in the tomb.

Sunday: the first day of the week, the Festival of First Fruits

On the third day, Jesus rose from the grave. It was the first day of the week and the day after the Sabbath, according to Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:1-3, Luke 23:56-24:3. John 20:1 says the Resurrection took place on the first day of the week. He does not explicitly say that the previous day was the Sabbath, but there is no room in his narrative for any intervening days. The first day of the week is the Jewish name for Sunday. Sunday is also the eighth day after the

creation in Genesis, so Paul describes Jesus' Resurrection as the first fruits of the new creation in 1 Cor. 15:20-23.

Biblical Foundations:

- Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all inform us that the Last Supper and the Crucifixion took place on Preparation Day.
- Mark and John inform us that the next day, the day after the Crucifixion, was the Sabbath.
- Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John inform us that the Resurrection took place on the first day of the week.
- Matthew, Mark, and Luke inform us that the day before the Resurrection was the Sabbath, and John heavily implies it.

Ancient Christian writers confirm this reconstruction. In The Apostolic Constitutions, Book V, Section III, it says that the Last Supper occurred on the fifth day of the week (Thursday), that Jesus was crucified on the next day (Friday), and rose on the first day (Sunday), and it explicitly states that this constitutes three days and three nights. The Apostolic Constitutions uses Roman-style midnight-to-midnight days, so this squares with the New Testament's use of sundown-to-sundown days. It also says that Jesus gave the apostles a commandment to pass on to us, to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays; the first to commemorate His betrayal, the second to commemorate His passion on the cross.

Therefore, it is obvious that the Crucifixion took place on a Friday, that Jesus rested in the tomb on Saturday, and rose from the grave on Sunday. So, you might ask, why didn't the gospel writers just come right out and say that it was Friday, Saturday, and Sunday? The answer is that they did, for the circumstances under which they wrote. They were writing for an audience beyond Palestine, and in the Roman Empire of the first century, there was no general consensus about the names of the days of the week, the number of the current year, the names and lengths of the months, the date of the new year, or the time at which the day began. On that last point, the day began at midnight in Egypt, at sunrise in Greece, and at sunset in Palestine. So even though it is not what we are used to, the gospels are really worded in such a way as to make the dates and times comprehensible to anyone in the Roman Empire who was familiar with the Jewish Scriptures.

When you count days you get a different answer than when you subtract dates. If you go to a three-day seminar that begins on Friday, you expect it to end on Sunday, because Friday, Saturday, and Sunday are three days. However, if you subtract the date of Friday from the date of Sunday, the answer is two elapsed days. The ancients counted days instead of calculating elapsed time—in fact, Jesus Himself counted days this way in Luke 13:31-32. This is why the tradition is universal that Jesus spent three days in the tomb when He was buried on Friday and rose from the dead on Sunday. All intervals in the Jewish and Christian calendars are calculated the same way, which is why Pentecost falls on a Sunday and not on a Monday.

BLESSING OF EASTER FOOD:

The tradition of food blessing at Easter, which has early-medieval roots in Christian society, The tradition is said to date from the 7th century in its basic form, the more modern form containing bread and eggs (symbols of resurrection and Christ) are said to date from the 12th century.

Most of us probably think of Easter baskets as something brought by a rabbit and stuffed with eggs, chocolate and other candies, that children find around the house on Easter morning. However, there are Easter baskets that involve the entire family, are full of food — not candy (though there are eggs) — and are often carried on Holy Saturday.

Those with Eastern European backgrounds — Poland, Russia, Serbia, Slovenia, Hungary, Ukraine, the Balkans and other countries with Slavic tradition — might be familiar with the blessing of Easter foods. Called **Święconka** in Polish, the food baskets are brought to Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches on Holy Saturday, around noon.

The foods in these baskets are rich in Easter symbolism and serve to do more than whet one's appetite after the long season of Lenten fasting.

The foods that have a place of honor on the festive Easter table are the decorated hard boiled eggs, which are broken and shared by all, and a lamb molded of butter or pastry, representing Christ as the "Lamb of God." Butter may also be placed into a glass container with cloves in the form of a cross studding the top.

Basket Contents and Symbolism

- Eggs – Decorated Ukrainian pysanky or various dyed or plain white eggs; symbolizing hope, new life and Christ's Resurrection from the tomb
- Butter – Dairy products are included to celebrate the end of Lent and the richness of our salvation; reminds us of the goodness of Christ that we should have toward all things
- Easter Bread – A round loaf, sweetened yeast Paska or rye, topped with a cross, symbolic of Jesus, the Bread of Life
- Horseradish – Symbolic of the bitterness and harshness of the Passion of Christ; the vinegar it is mixed with symbolizing the sour wine given to Jesus on the cross but sweetened with some sugar because of the Resurrection. This may be white or pink with grated red beets
- Pepper – Also symbolic of the Passion of Christ and the bitter herbs
- Kielbassa/Sausage – The links are symbolic of the chains of death that were broken when Jesus rose from the dead, as well as God's favor and generosity
- Ham, Lamb or Veal – Meats are symbolic of great joy and abundance in Christ's Resurrection
- Smoked Bacon – With its great fattiness, it is a symbol of the overabundance of God's mercy and generosity
- Salt – A necessary element in our physical life; symbolic of purification, prosperity and justice; preserves us from corruption. Jesus used its symbolism: "You are the salt of the earth"
- Cheese – Usually fresh, dry curd or farmer's cheese shaped into a ball, it is the symbol of the moderation Christians should practice
- Holy Water – Used to bless the home, animals, fields and used in various rituals throughout the year
- Sweets – Fruits, candy, poppy seed and nut rolls, pastry items; promise of eternal life or good things to come

The food included within any basket can be easily personalized to meet family needs and desires. However, the three-part blessing specifically addresses special prayers for the meats, eggs, cakes and breads.

LENTEN REFLECTIONS FOR THE WEEKDAYS OF HOLY WEEK

MONDAY 15 APR

Most of the people who saw Jesus on that final week of His life were hostile to Him. But six days before the feast of Passover during which Jesus was crucified, He experienced a very great kindness. Not only is He the guest at the table of a family that He loves, one member of that family, Mary, went to great expense to render Him a very thoughtful service. She anointed His feet with very expensive perfume and dried them with her hair. A little later in the same gospel, Jesus will wash the feet of His followers.

Mary, the sister of Lazarus, anticipated that servant-gesture of Jesus Himself. She offered Him a generous, loving service exactly like what Jesus did for His disciples, and for all of us. Jesus interprets her generous act as preparing Him for His death and burial. At the beginning of the last Week of His life, He welcomed this act of kindness from Mary of Bethany. What that woman did for Him we are called to do for each other. On our own life journey, we may meet people who make things difficult for us. We will also experience people like Mary who support us on our journey, and, hopefully, we can do for others what Mary did for Jesus, a kind and generous gesture in an often hostile world.

TUESDAY 16 APR

What a variety of response to Jesus in the final days of his life! Judas slinks off *into the dark*, while the beloved disciple has *reclined next to Jesus*, literally “upon His chest.” In his opening chapter the evangelist described Jesus as “upon the chest of the Father” (or *in the Father’s bosom*). This *beloved disciple* seems to have a similarly close relationship with Jesus. He is an iconic figure, the kind of disciple we are all invited to become.

The beloved disciple is not given a definite *name*, because we are all invited to put our own name on him. We can identify with him and seek be like him. We are called to the same relationship with Jesus as the beloved disciple had. That is why Jesus goes on to say, “As the Father has loved Me, so I have loved you; remain in My love.” We can share in Our Lord’s special relationship with His Father in heaven. That is something to ponder, during this Holy Week.

WEDNESDAY 17 APR

The early church was very aware that Jesus was betrayed by one of His closest associates. Although this was a very uncomfortable truth for the early church, there was no attempt to gloss over the disturbing truth that, in the words of today’s gospel, Jesus was betrayed by someone who dipped his hand into the dish with Jesus, someone who was an intimate. The gospel declares that when Jesus announced that one of those sharing table with Him would betray Him, everyone present was “greatly distressed.” To be betrayed by someone you trust is very distressing for the one betrayed and for all those associated with him.

Some of us may have had our trust betrayed by people close to us. We confided in someone and they used that information against us. This week tells us that such betrayal need not have the last word. God the Father had the last word by raising His Son from the dead. He brought good out of the evil of betrayal and the many other evils that Jesus endured. Divine Providence can also bring good out of the negative things we sometimes have to endure from others. The Passion of Jesus bids us to trust that God can work in life-giving ways even after the darkest experiences.

PRAYERS

Holy Week Sunday

Loving God,
I am just beginning to
realize how much you love
me.
Your son, Jesus was
humble and obedient.
He fulfilled your will for
him by becoming human
and suffering with us.
I ask you for the desire to
become more humble
so that my own life might
also bear witness to you.
I want to use the small
sufferings I have in this
world
to give you glory.

Please, Lord, guide my
mind with your truth.
Strengthen my life by the
example of Jesus.
Help me to be with Jesus
in this week
as he demonstrates again
his total love for me.
He died so that I would no
longer
be separated from you.
Help me to feel how close
you are
and to live in union with
you.

Holy Week Monday

God of love,
My prayer is simple:
Your son, Jesus, suffered and
died for me.
I know only
that I cannot have real
strength
unless I rely on you.
I cannot feel protected
from my many weaknesses
until I turn to you
for forgiveness and your
unalterable love.
Help me to share this
strength, protection and love
with others.

Holy Week Tuesday

God of such unwavering
love,
how do I "celebrate"
the passion and death of
Jesus?
I often want to look the
other way
and not watch,
not stay with Jesus in his
suffering.
Give me the strength
to see his love with
honesty and compassion
and to feel deeply
your own forgiveness
and mercy for me.
Help me to understand
how to "celebrate" this
week.
I want be able to bring
my weaknesses and
imperfections with me
as I journey with Jesus
this week,
so aware of his love.

Holy Week

Wednesday

My savior,
do you invite me to share
in the glory of the
resurrection?
Please stay with me
as I struggle to see
how accepting the crosses
of my life
will free me from the
power
of the one who wants only
to destroy my love and
trust in you.
Help me to be humble and
accepting
like your son, Jesus.
I want to turn to you
with the same trust he had
in your love.
Save me, Lord. Only you
can save me.

Holy Week

Thursday

Loving Provider,
you gather me in this upper
room with your son,
to be fed by your love.
At that supper, Jesus told us
to "love one another"
and I know that is the heart
of his gift,
his sacrifice for me.
I ask that I might find the
source of my own heart,
the meaning for my own life,
in that Eucharist.
Guide me to the fullness of
your love and life.

Holy Week

Friday

My Lord,
your son has suffered so
much, shed so much
blood.
I was born with so many
faults
and my nature is so full
of weakness,
and yet your son Jesus
has died on the cross.
For *me*.
I know your grace has
the power
to cleanse me of my
many sins
and to make me more
like your Son.
Thank you for your
goodness and love for
me.
I ask you, Father, to
watch over me - always.

PASTOR'S UP-COMING SCHEDULE

Saturday 13 April Mass 8:30 a.m.
Rehearsals RCIA
Rehearsals Altar Servers
Confessions 1:30 – 4:30 p.m.
Vigil Mass Passion / Palm Sunday 5:00 p.m. Blessing & Distribution of Palm

Sunday 14 April **Passion / Palm Sunday**
Masses 7:00 a.m., 8:30 a.m., 11:30 a.m. 5:00 p.m. Blessing and distribution of palm at all Masses. 11:30 a.m. Mass will include the formal blessing and procession into the church from the Bell Tower and

Portico
 Brig 7:00 p.m.
 Monday 15 Apr Priest's Day Off
 Mass 6:30 a.m. and 8:30 a.m. Confessions between the Masses
 Chrisim Mass Cathedral of the Sacred Heart 6:00 p.m.
 Tuesday 16 Apr Mass 6:30 a.m.
 Confessions 7:00 – 8:30 a.m.
 Mass 8:30 a.m.
 Wednesday 17 Apr Mass 6:30 a.m.
 Confessions 7:00 – 8:30 a.m.
 Mass 8:30 a.m.
Thursday 18 Apr Holy Thursday
7:00 p.m. Mass
11:30 p.m. Compline
Friday 12 Apr Good Friday
 Saturday 13 Apr Mass 8:30 a.m.
 Rehearsal for RCIA
 Rehearsal for Altar Servers for Triduum services
 Confessions 1:30 – 4:30 p.m.
 Vigil Mass Passion/Palm Sunday 5:00 p.m. Blessing and distribution of
 palm
 Sunday 14 Apr Passion/Palm Sunday
 Masses 7:00 a.m., 8:30 a.m., 11:30 a.m. 5:00 p.m. Blessing and
 distribution of palm at all Masses. 11:30 a.m. Mass will include the
 formal blessing and procession into the church from the Bell Tower and
 Portico
 Brig 7:00 p.m.

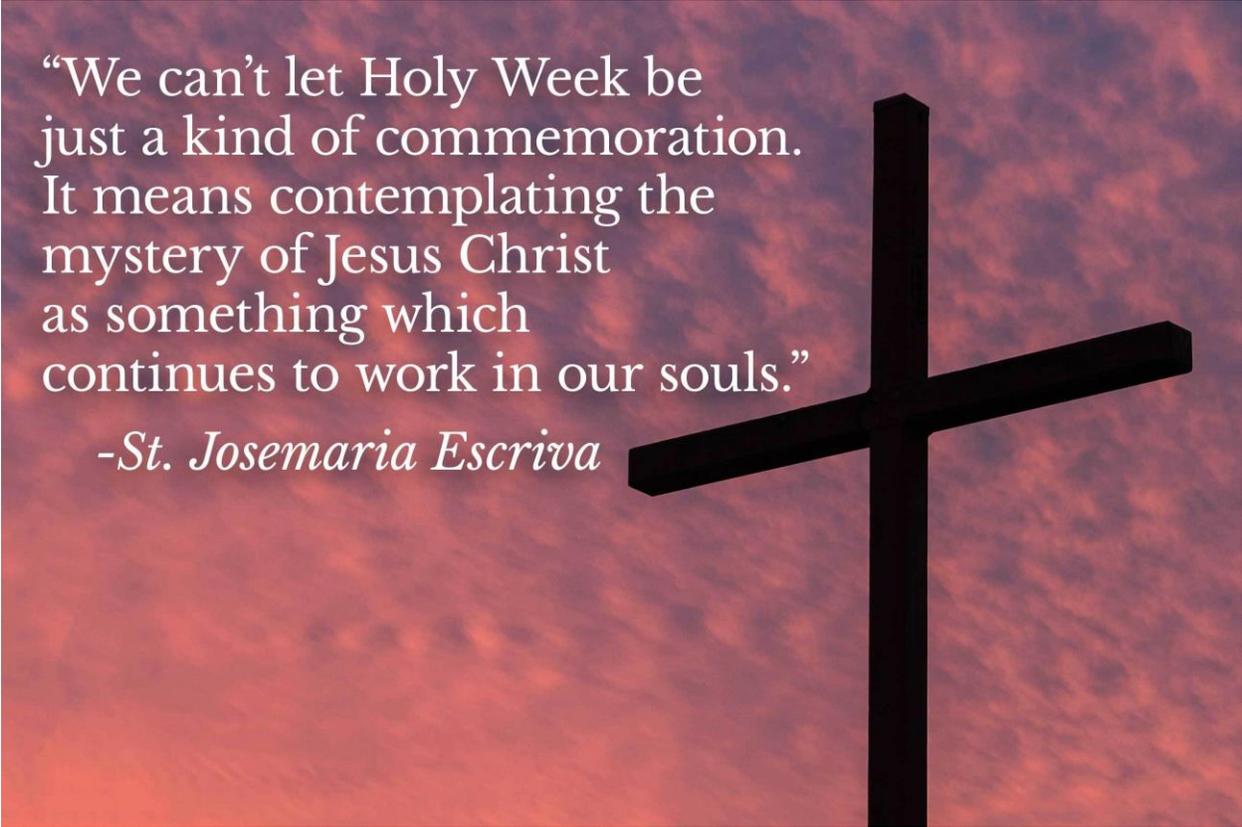
HOLY WEEK

Monday 15 Apr 6:30 a.m. Mass
7 – 8:30 a.m. Confessions
8:30 a.m. Mass
Brig 7:40 p.m.
Tuesday 16 Apr 6:30 a.m. Mass
7-8:30 a.m. Confessions
8:30 a.m. Mass
Wednesday 17 Apr 6:30 a.m. Mass
7-8:30 a.m. Confessions
8:30 a.m. Mass
HOLY THURSDAY 18 Apr 7:00 p.m. Mass
11:30 p.m. Compline
Good Friday 19 Apr Morning Prayer 8:30 a.m.

Tre Orie 12 Noon – 3:00 p.m.
Stations of the Cross 3:00 p.m.
Communion Service and Veneration of the Cross 7:00 p.m.
Compline 11:30 p.m.

Holy Saturday 20 Apr Morning Prayer 8:30 a.m.
Blessing of Baskets 12 Noon
Egg Hunt 1:00 p.m.
Vigil Mass of Easter 8:00 p.m.

Easter Sunday 21 Apr Sunrise Mass 6:30 a.m. In cemetery garden
(weather permitting)
8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m. 1:00 p.m.
Brig 7:00 p.m.



“We can’t let Holy Week be just a kind of commemoration. It means contemplating the mystery of Jesus Christ as something which continues to work in our souls.”

-St. Josemaria Escriva

Thought this article might prove interesting to some.

Catholic doctor gives medical view of Christ's passion, crucifixion

By Tom Dermody [Catholic News Service](#)

4.10.2019 3:55 PM ET

DAVENPORT, Iowa (CNS) -- Jesus likely died from excessive blood loss, a Catholic surgeon said April 4 during a talk that examined the 18 hours of Christ's passion and crucifixion from a medical perspective. "Christ emptied himself," Dr. Timothy Millea told about 100 people at his home parish of St. Paul the Apostle in Davenport. "As a surgeon, two words that make our hair stand on end are 'bleeding out,'" he said. "If you can't stop it, you can't keep that patient alive."

Millea, an orthopedic surgeon with offices in Iowa and Illinois, is president of a local chapter of the Catholic Medical Association for members in those two states.

He said an adult male has about 1.5 gallons of blood and that the loss of 40 percent of that blood can lead to hypovolemic shock, a life-threatening condition. Jesus likely surpassed that threshold after repeated beatings through the night, an intense scourging at the hands of Roman soldiers that included wearing a crown of thorns and having nails driven through his upper wrists and feet.

"Some people ask, did Jesus really die of physical factors, or did he -- as God -- say, 'OK, my work is done,'" said Millea. After taking his audience hour-by-hour through Jesus' physical and emotional suffering from the Agony in the Garden to his death on the cross, Millea countered that "how he lived this long is one of the biggest divine mysteries."

He said his interest in researching this topic began in 1986 when he read an article "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ" in the Journal of the American Medical Association. His subsequent research showed that Jesus' medical condition has been discussed since the 16th century.

Among the latest sources he quoted was the 2014 book "A Doctor at Calvary: The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ" by Dr. Pierre Barbet. Millea also referenced modern research on the Shroud of Turin, believed by many to be Jesus' burial cloth.

For example, he said the man whose image is seen on the shroud was 5 feet 10 inches tall and weighed about 175 pounds. While tradition says Jesus was whipped 39 times in his scourging, nearly 400 wound marks are counted on the shroud and "every one of them (was) bleeding" on the day of his death.

While he promised his talk would not be "like watching Mel Gibson's movie again" -- a reference to the graphic depictions of Jesus' sufferings in the 2004 biblical drama "The Passion of the Christ" -- there came a time in his description of the crucifixion when he paused and asked his audience to "bear with me, we're going to get through this. I don't like this part, either, but it's pretty important."

He described Jesus' passion and death as "a tragic story, a horrible story, a painful story," but ended his presentation by showing an image of the resurrected Christ on the screen to illustrate that "this story doesn't end with where we finish tonight."

The surgeon acknowledged that other physicians and historians have suggested that Jesus might have died from asphyxiation because breathing was so difficult on the cross. Others say perhaps he had a heart attack after the hours of physical exertion and trauma.

But Millea feels the blood loss theory is not only medically likely but it also corresponds with the theological teachings of atoning sacrifice, with Jesus taking the place of the slaughtered lambs of the Old Testament. Sacrificed animals also died from blood loss.

"Jesus was literally the sacrificial lamb," he said.

Other medical and historical evidence the surgeon cited included:

-- A rare medical condition that matches the description in the Gospel of Luke that Jesus' sweat during his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane "became like drops of blood." The condition, called

hematohidrosis, causes blood to be released through the skin and "is almost always associated with intense emotion or physically challenging episodes."

-- The whip used in the scourging was likely a flagrum, with leather cords 2 feet long that contained metal objects, glass and lead balls. "It was a very diabolically effective means of harming the tissues down to muscle depth," said Millea.

-- The crown of thorns likely more resembled a helmet than the laurel wreath depicted in art. "Every time the soldiers hit the thorns, they impaled in his scalp," said Millea. "If you've ever had a cut on your scalp, you know it bleeds like crazy."

-- Jesus probably only carried the horizontal beam of the cross, because both beams would have weighed 300 pounds. "You've got a 175-pound man who has been beaten, he's bleeding, he hasn't eaten or slept or had anything to drink, and he's going to carry 100 pounds for 600 yards. He fell three times? It's a miracle he didn't fall more often."

-- The nails in Jesus' hands likely would not have been in the palms, which could not have held his weight. There is a space in the upper wrist where ligaments are strong. "The problem, for those of you who have had carpal tunnel problems, is that the median nerve travels through there," said Millea, meaning the pain would have been intense.

Millea went through Jesus' last seven recorded phrases -- including "I thirst" and "It is finished" -- which he said were necessarily short because of the difficulty in breathing that Jesus was experiencing. He said the crucifixion was a public spectacle and Jesus' followers most likely thought it was the worst thing that could have happened not knowing that it would later prove to "be the best thing that ever happened."

Dermody is editor-in-chief of The Catholic Post, newspaper of Diocese of Peoria, Illinois.