



REFLECTION

It is important to remind ourselves that Lent exists only as a preparation for something bigger. That something bigger is the Easter Triduum. The term Easter Triduum might not sound familiar to you; however, you are very familiar with it. The Triduum is the three-day celebration of the death and resurrection of Christ - Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Vigil/Easter Sunday. In a normal year the Church meets at times during those three days to remember what it is that Jesus has done for us. This year we meet in a unique fashion of separated-togetherness. Lent often overshadows the Triduum, but the documents from Vatican Council II tell us: "Christ redeemed us all and gave perfect glory to God principally through His paschal mystery: dying He destroyed our death and rising He restored our life. Therefore the Easter Triduum of the passion and resurrection of Christ is the culmination of the entire liturgical year.

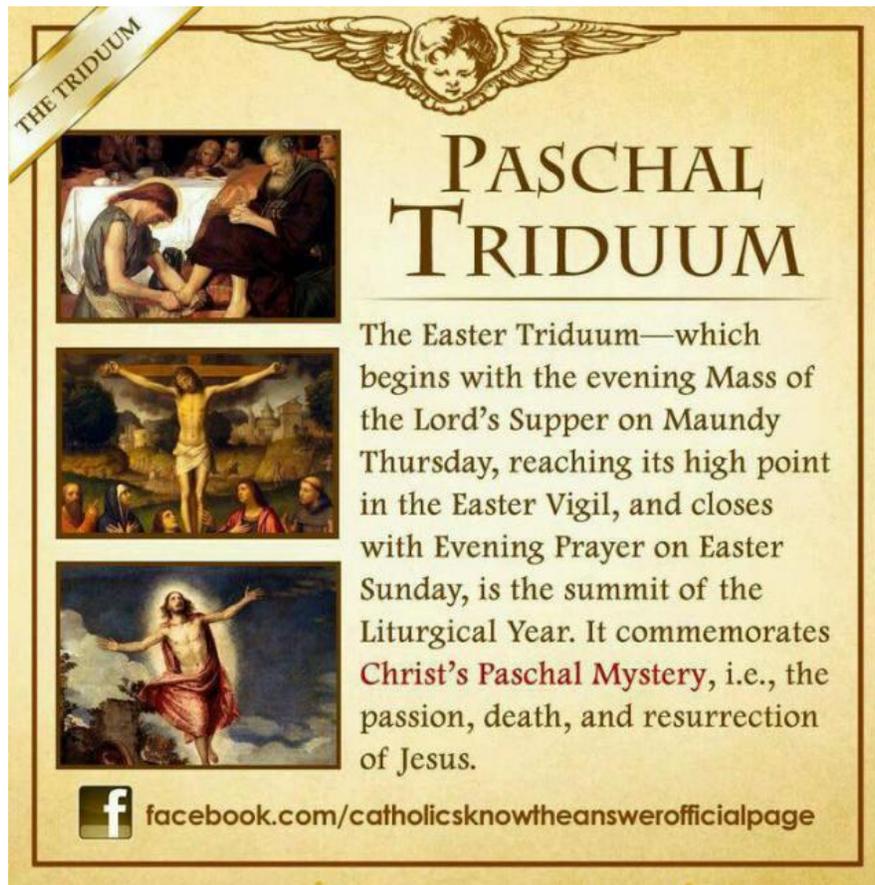
Sundown on Holy Thursday during Holy Week marks the beginning of three sacred days (Triduum) that changed the destiny of the human race. This year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, congregations will not be able to attend the special liturgies that help make this time so special. However, each service with modifications will be celebrated in parish churches and live-streamed so that the faithful can in one sense be present at the liturgy. Due to this fact, we are challenged to actively look for the positive in focusing our attention on aspects of the liturgies that may be overwhelmed by the variety of rituals that have surrounded us in the past. This year let us take advantage of some of the quiet personal and family prayer that we often don't have time to do in normal times. It would be a loss to let this extended "stay-at-home" period go by without taking some time for extended prayer and reflection. So set aside some

time and let the Spirit help you pick and choose which of these Holy Week and Triduum devotions will best help you make the most of this special time.

Lent exists so that we can prepare ourselves for these three great days. What is remembered during these three days is so spectacular and miraculous that it takes the Church fifty days to celebrate it. From the close of Easter Sunday until Pentecost we celebrate with great joy that which Jesus has done for us. Imagine that a loved one a close friend has died and suddenly that person is brought back to life. Imagine your joy. How would you express that joy? Could you be happy for one day and be done with it? Probably not. It would take many days, perhaps a lifetime to express your joy. Because that person's life has been restored, your life has been restored. That is exactly what happens. Jesus dies a hideous death. God's only Son sent to save us has been put to death. And then suddenly he is alive again. We need fifty days to celebrate this great miracle - or perhaps we need our lifetime to express it. Thus we take forty days (Lent) to prepare, three days (Easter Triduum) to experience, and fifty days (Easter time) to celebrate the great mystery of our faith. In the weeks of Lent, we will explore the importance of the Easter Triduum and what each of the three days celebrates. Those days are so important that all who are able are encouraged to celebrate them together. Hopefully, the knowledge you gain throughout the upcoming weeks will call you to be present at the celebration of the Easter Triduum

What the Triduum commemorates, that which makes it the "culmination of the entire liturgical year," is the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because Jesus was willing to die for our sins and was resurrected, death no longer is the end of life for us. It is the beginning of new life. We gather at the Easter Triduum to remember the saving act of Jesus and the miracle of his resurrection. Because Jesus died and was resurrected, we live. The term triduum means "three days." The three days are counted as the Hebrews counted their days, from dusk to dusk. Therefore, the three days of the Easter Triduum are from dusk on Holy Thursday to dusk on Good Friday (day one), dusk on Good Friday to dusk on Holy Saturday (day two), and dusk on Holy Saturday to dusk on Easter Sunday (day three). Each of those days "tells" a different part of the story of Jesus' saving action. On Holy Thursday we remember the Last Supper. Jesus gives us the Eucharist and tells us to "Do this in memory of me." He then washes the feet of the apostles. On Good Friday we remember the passion and death of Jesus. We celebrate the resurrection of Christ either at the Easter Vigil on Saturday night when new members are baptized and welcomed into our Catholic community or on Easter Sunday morning. We look at the Easter Triduum as one single celebration that lasts for three days. We cannot separate the death of Jesus from his resurrection. We do not spend all of the three days in church, but at various times during those days, we are called Three Holy Days: The Triduum <http://www.nativity.org/Triduum.html> 3 of 7 04/09/2003 07:14 PM to church to gather and remember together. When we are not in church, we are asked to keep the spirit of those days even in our homes, if possible. Those days are not days of "business as usual." In the weeks ahead we will look at each of the three days to learn something about the significance of each day and how we can prepare ourselves to draw closer to God through a good observance of the Easter Triduum. "Christ redeemed us all and gave perfect glory to God principally through his Pascal mystery: dying he destroyed our death and rising he restored our life. Therefore, the Easter Triduum of the passion and resurrection of Christ is the culmination of the entire liturgical year." General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar, #18 Part II of this seriously talks about the three days of the Easter Triduum: dusk of Holy Thursday to dusk of Good Friday, dusk of Good Friday to dusk of Holy Saturday, and dusk of Holy Saturday to dusk of Easter Sunday. We set these days aside as days to remember the great saving action of Jesus Christ on our behalf and his resurrection on the third day. We are called to church at various times during these three days to remember together, and when we are not in church,

we try to spend our time at home more simply with quiet time and less influence from the outside world of entertainment and activity.



THE TRIDUUM

PASCHAL TRIDUUM

The Easter Triduum—which begins with the evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper on Maundy Thursday, reaching its high point in the Easter Vigil, and closes with Evening Prayer on Easter Sunday, is the summit of the Liturgical Year. It commemorates **Christ’s Paschal Mystery**, i.e., the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

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SCHEDULE FOR TRIDUUM

HOLY THURSDAY 9 APR

8:30 A.M. MORNING PRAYER LIVE STREAMED

7:00 P.M. MASS OF THE LORD'S SUPPER LIVE STREAMED

8:00 P.M.- MIDNIGHT ADORATION LIVE STREAMED

CHURCH OPEN FOR PRAYER 12 NOON – 4:00 P.M.

GOOD FRIDAY 10 APR

8:30 A.M. MORNING PRAYER LIVE STREAMED

3:00 P.M. STATIONS OF THE CROSS LIVE STREAMED

7:00 P.M. PRAYER SERVICE / VENERATION OF THE CROSS

LIVE STREAMED

CHURCH OPEN FOR PRAYER 12 NOON – 2:30 P.M.

HOLY SATURDAY 11 APR

8:30 A.M. MORNING PRAYER LIVE STREAMED

12 NOON VIRTUAL BLESSING OF EASTER FOODS LIVE STREAMED

8:00 P.M. EASTER VIGIL MASS

EASTER SUNDAY 12 APR

8:30 A.M. MASS LIVE STREAMED

11:30 A.M. MASS LIVE STREAMED

HOLY THURSDAY



REFLECTION

READINGS

Ex. 12:1-8, 11-14: Originally associated with the move to summer pastures, the ceremony of the Passover Lamb came to be associated with the commandments given to Moses and Aaron in Egypt before the Exodus. Putting the lamb's blood on the doorposts reminded the people of Israel that the angel passed over them when he brought death to the first born of the Egyptians.

1 Cor. 11:23-26: In the account of its institution as St. Paul passed it on to the Church in Corinth, the Eucharist is a 'reembrance' of Christ's death, not just as something past and in danger of being forgotten, but as a way of making life, death and resurrection powerfully present wherever, and whenever, it is celebrated. 'Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are proclaiming the death of the Lord.'

Jn. 13:34: (Gospel Acclamation) The new 'commandment' mentioned here, *mandatum* in Latin, or *mande* in French, is the origin of the old name for today, Holy Thursday: 'Maundy' Thursday. This name highlights the loving service of all our brothers and sisters in the human family which is, and ought to be, the brand-mark of our lives as Christians.

Jn. 13:1-15: Jesus takes on the work normally associated with a slave, by washing the feet of His disciples knowing that one of them would betray Him. When Peter objects, Jesus tells him that he can have 'no part' in Jesus unless he allows Jesus to wash his feet. His disciples should follow the example of their Lord and Master by washing one another's feet.

Many people are under the impression that Lent ends with Easter Sunday, but Lent really ends at dusk on Holy Thursday. Our forty-day preparation for celebrating a good Easter is complete on Thursday; our time is up. All regular masses in a parish are suspended to allow for only one mass, the mass of the Last Supper held always on Thursday evening. There are no daytime masses held anywhere in the Catholic world, only the evening mass which begins the Triduum celebration. Because the procession of Holy Thursday is the procession for a three-day celebration, it is larger and more encompassing than the procession of a regular Sunday mass. One part of the procession exclusive to Holy Thursday is the procession of the holy oils. The oils used in the parish throughout the year are received at the Chrism Mass, a special mass held once a year at the cathedral and presided over by the bishop. All the oil used in the entire diocese is blessed and presented to each parish at that time.

The sacred Scripture which we hear this night reminds us of the first Passover meal of the Israelites as they prepare for their journey out of slavery in Egypt. We then hear of the institution of the Eucharist by Christ and his admonition of "Do this, in remembrance of me." And then we have the wonderful example of the service to which we all are called when Jesus, who is Lord and master, takes a basin of water and a towel and washes the feet of his apostles ending with the words, "What I just did was to give you an example: as I have done, so you must do." Christ saves us from the slavery of sin, the Eucharist nourishes and strengthens us so that we can serve our brothers and sisters. In order to reinforce this important teaching of Jesus, the presider of the mass washes the feet of members of the parish family. The mass continues; we receive the Eucharist and the final blessing. The Blessed Sacrament is then taken to the chapel to rest there; the sanctuary is cleared, and we are invited to stay and vigil with the Blessed Sacrament until midnight, if we so desire. There is no procession to end this mass because the celebration does not end. The prayer continues in our homes until we are called together again on Good Friday to remember the next part of the story of our salvation.

HOLY THURSDAY- BEGINNING OF THE TRIDUUM

Jn. 13:1-18:27 deals with the beginning of the Triduum – the words and deeds of Jesus on the evening of Holy Thursday, including the washing of feet of the disciples and the Last Supper discourse and priestly prayer of our Lord, Jesus arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane and Peter's denial. Prayerfully read as much of this as you can—these are some of the most powerful and moving chapters in the entire Bible, perfect for prayer during Holy Week.

GOOD FRIDAY



REFLECTION

READINGS

Is. 52:13-53:12: The fourth of the Suffering Servant songs in Isaiah presents the suffering and death of the Yahweh's servant-prophet as bringing about the purification of many nations. Despised and rejected, He bore the sorrows and infirmities of His people but, by doing so He brought them healing. In the context of the Good Friday liturgy, this reading prophetically foretells the sufferings that Christ would endure for our sins and the victory that He would win for us through His suffering and death.

Ps. 30:2, 6, 12-13, 15-17, 25: The verses express the confident trust in God of one who is beset by his foes and abandoned by all who know him. Yahweh is a refuge and he entrusts his life to God who can deliver him from the hands of his persecutors. By quoting Jesus' words on the cross, the response implies that these are also the sentiments of Jesus during His crucifixion.

Heb. 4:14-16; 5:7-9: The author presents Jesus as the supreme High Priest who has been tempted in every way that we are, though He is without sin. Through His ascension, He has entered the holy of holies in heaven and, through Him, we can be confident of our access to the mercy of God whenever we need it. Jesus learnt to obey through suffering and He became for all who obey Him the source of eternal salvation.

Phil. 3:8-9: (Gospel acclamation) Part of the Christ-hymn: note that these verses link the moment of death with the moment of exaltation.

Jn. 18:1-19:42: For John, the passion is the public exaltation of Christ that completes His work. Throughout this reading Christ is the powerful one (a king before earthly power personified in Pilate) who is powerless; yet His power, which even nature obeys by its becoming dark, is manifested when He is raised on the Cross. The text proposes to the readers the question: who is your king. Have you no king but Caesar? Or, do you; recognize Jesus as king and stand by His cross?

Something which has always set Good Friday apart is that it is a day of fast and abstinence. Because we are asked to fast on Good Friday, we often think of this day as part of Lent. But remember that Lent ended at dusk on Thursday (Holy Thursday). The fast of Good Friday is not the Lenten fast of discipline and repentance. It is the excited, nervous fasting of anticipation. We might all have experienced this type of fast before a wedding (a happy time) or before a wake or funeral (a sad time). At these times food is not important to us. On Friday we remember that something monumental happened. We remember that someone died so that we might live. – not just someone, but God. We begin the service in silence with no procession. There is no need to process. This service does not stand alone; it is a continuation of what began on Holy Thursday. The priest and deacon, in a normal year, kneel or more often prostrate themselves before the altar. This year, due to circumstances of the COVID-19 some of the rituals have been abbreviated, and due to the fact that I am temporarily functioning without a knee while the infection is treated and a new knee is reinstalled we will practice a solemn bow as a sign of utter humility before God. During the Liturgy of the Word, the Passion of Christ is proclaimed. We listen and remember how Jesus suffered and died for our sins. After the Passion we are reminded that there are many people in the world who need our prayers, and so in our role as priestly people we pray a more lengthy and elaborate form of the General Intercessions. Then a cross, the symbol of our salvation, in other years is normally brought in to stand on the floor before the altar. This year the cross will already be present and will rest on the steps leading up to the altar. As you may remember it has been placed in the church to be venerated. The veneration of the cross is a practice unique to Good Friday. It is our opportunity to humble ourselves before the awesome saving action of Christ. In other years we would have approached the cross, this year you are invited to use a cross at home, or to gaze and reflect on the large timber cross with the relic of the True Cross attached that has been used here at St. Stephen's for years and visible in the live-stream. Normally after the veneration we would participate in a simple reception of the Eucharist. This year the simple reception of the Eucharist will have been pared back to only those of us in the church receiving the Eucharist, and the praying together of the prayer for a Spiritual Communion. The service ends in silence continuing our prayer and fasting until we gather again on Holy Saturday evening for the Easter Vigil.

ACTIVITIES

GOOD FRIDAY MORNING

1.) Repentance for Complicity in Christ's Betrayal

Read Lk. 22:39 through Lk. 23:26, but only after a moment of prayer in which you ask the Holy Spirit to answer these questions in the course of your reading:

- 1 In what way am I an accomplice in the betrayal and execution of the Lord?
- 2 Whom in the gospel narrative do I most resemble: the disciples asleep in the garden? the cowardly Peter? the irresponsible Pilate? someone else?
- 3 Write down the answers in your journal, if you keep one. If not, start one.

In response to the Spirit's prompting

- 1 Pray a prayer repenting of the particular sins in your life that have made you an accomplice in the Lord's betrayal and execution
- 2 Confidently ask the Lord to help you to root these sins out of your life.
- 3 Engage in any spiritual warfare necessary to dislodge the Enemy from the area of your life under consideration by renouncing Satan and all his empty promises. Invoke angelic help through the Prayer to St. Michael the Archangel.
- 4 Finally, seal this process by a slow, prayerful reading of Psalm 51. You might even feel led to memorize a portion of it.

2. Putting on the Mind of Christ

Now that we have cast off the "mind" of darkness, we can put on "the mind of Christ."

- 1 Read Phil. 2:5:11 and consider how Jesus' humble self-offering on the cross was the perfect manifestation of his "mind."
- 2 Read Phil. 2:1-5, 14-15 and see how St. Paul commands us to have the same mind as the Lord.
- 3 Ask the Lord what particular characteristics of his mind he wishes to impart to you in a new way during these special days: humility? obedience? a new degree of self-giving love expressed through humble service of others? Some other? Ask Him to show you how this is to be worked out concretely and practically in the present circumstances of your life. Write in your journal whatever the Holy Spirit brings to mind.
- 4 Say yes to what He wants to do in you and ask Him to make it happen by the power of His Spirit.
- 5 Use Psalm 116, one of the "Hallel" Psalms prayed by Jesus at the Last Supper, to express your gratitude to the Lord for freeing you from sin through his death and for bestowing upon you his mind.

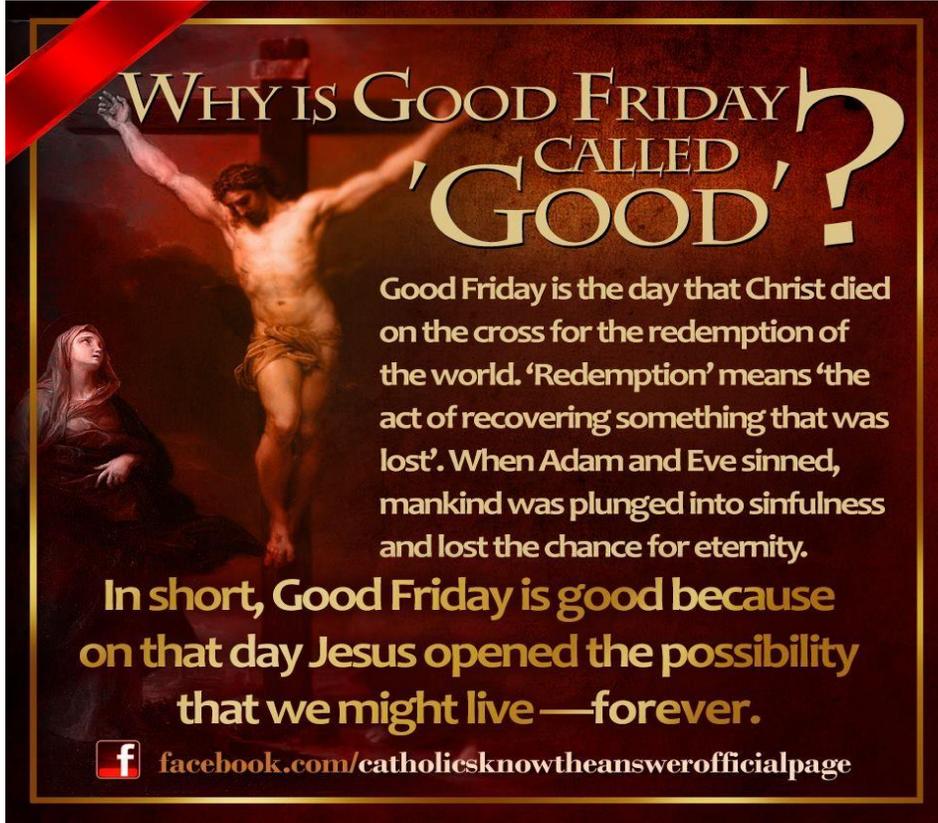
GOOD FRIDAY AFTERNOON

The most solemn time of the Triduum, Holy Week, and indeed the whole Christian year, is from noon to 3:00 PM on Good Friday since that was the time of the Lord's agony on the cross according to the Gospel of John. During this time, we should strive to honor the death of the Lord in the most personal and heartfelt way possible.

- 1 Meditate slowly and deeply upon Is. 52:13 through Is. 53:13. This is the song of the Suffering Servant.
- 2 Read Zech. 12:10 and respond with silent prayer of mourning and adoration. You may want to make use of "the Jesus Prayer" which consists of the following petition repeated over and over: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner."
- 3 In Jesus' time, the way to refer to a Psalm was not by its number but by its first

line. Jesus' cry from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me," is the first line of Ps. 22. Read the entire Psalm slowly as if the whole thing were Jesus' prayer from the cross.

- 4 Meditate on Heb. 9:11-28 This scripture relates how Christ the High Priest, by the shedding of His own blood, enters the sanctuary once and for all.



**WHY IS GOOD FRIDAY
CALLED
'GOOD'?**

Good Friday is the day that Christ died on the cross for the redemption of the world. 'Redemption' means 'the act of recovering something that was lost'. When Adam and Eve sinned, mankind was plunged into sinfulness and lost the chance for eternity.

In short, Good Friday is good because on that day Jesus opened the possibility that we might live—forever.

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SABBATUM SANCTUM

Holy Saturday (Sabbatum Sanctum) is sacred as the day of the Lord's rest. The day is and should be the most calm and quiet day of the entire Church year, a day broken by no liturgical function. Christ lies in the grave, the Church sits near and mourns. After the great battle He is resting in peace, but upon Him we see the scars of intense suffering. The mortal wounds on His Body remain visible.

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HOLY SATURDAY REFLECTION

We spoke last above about the fast of Good Friday, not a fast of repentance but a fast of anticipation. The Church asks us, though it is not a requirement, to continue our fast through Saturday, if possible. Our anticipation has not ended with the death of Christ. In fact, our anticipation increases as we wait for the resurrection; for, our salvation was not a result of Christ's death alone but of his death and resurrection. We await His resurrection in nervous anticipation. The Easter Triduum begins with the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday; it reaches its high point in the Easter Vigil, celebrated on Saturday night. This celebration is usually a long one with much taking place, a lot to do in most years and most parishes. We proclaim with fire and song that Christ is risen. We listen to nine Scripture stories of God's interaction with humankind from creation through to the resurrection. We baptize those desiring to be Catholic and confirm and give Eucharist to those seeking full membership in the Catholic Church. Then we are strengthened with the spiritual food of Christ's body and blood. Because we have a lot to do this evening, we need time to do it well. Some people think of the celebration of the Easter Vigil as just another mass, but one that is Three Holy Days: The Triduum longer than a Sunday mass. This is not true. There are things we do at the Easter Vigil that we do at no other time in the church year. The most significant of these is the welcoming of new members into our Church and our parish. They have been studying and learning about us and what it means to be Catholic for a year, and now it is time for them to become one of us. We hear more of Holy Scripture proclaimed on this night because our salvation history is a long story dating back to the creation of the world. We build a large fire outside to remind us that Jesus is our light in the darkness, and after lighting the new Easter candle from this first fire, we process it into the darkened church and hear of Christ's resurrection. We need time to do all of these things well. A vigil is a watch kept for an extended period of time. In our daily lives we might keep vigil as we wait by the telephone or in a hospital waiting room for news. We cannot rush a vigil; it must take as long as it takes. The same is true of the Easter Vigil on Saturday night. As Masses go, it is considerably longer than a Sunday Mass. As vigils go, it is relatively short. Unfortunately this year due to the circumstances imposed on us by COVID-19 and the need to stay at home, keep distances etc. much has been removed from this Easter Vigil Mass. There will not be the blessing of the Easter Fire or a procession with the Paschal Candle. The Candle will be blessed and the Easter Proclamation proclaimed. The rites of the RCIA will not take place but will be held once we have

returned to normal operations. As with all of the live-streamed Masses only a handful of people will be able to receive the Eucharist while the rest viewing will pray the prayer for Spiritual Communion.

READINGS

Gen. 1:1-2:2: God created all that exists and loved all that exists, recognizing that it was 'very good.' God brought light out of darkness and created an environment truly fit for humanity, male and female, made in God's image and according to His likeness. God entrusted creation to the care of humanity and we were given dominion over all living things on the earth and responsibility for looking after creation in God's name. Humanity was created 'very good' but, through sin, the divine image in which we had been created became tarnished. Our sharing in Christ's resurrection restores the divine image in us and gives us, once again, the 'brand new' state of unity and harmony with God and with all creation.

Ex. 14:15-15-1: Hard pressed by the Egyptians, the Israelites are miraculously allowed to escape by walking across on dry ground where there had been an impassable sea. When the Egyptians follow, the waters close in and they are drowned. The crossing of the Red Sea and the escape of the Israelites from the Egyptians has been seen as a symbol of the effects of baptism in which, through water and the power of God, we escape from the power of sin and are given the freedom and grace proper to the children of God.

Ez. 36:16-17, 18-28: The prophet ('Son of Man') is told the message he is to address to Israel. Their faithlessness and disregard for the Law brought on the events that led to the exile so that they defiled God's holy land. God will bring them back again, but they must undergo a total renewal. The heart of stone will be replaced with a heart of flesh that is sensitive to the call of the Lord. The final sentence is a statement of the covenant – 'You shall be My people and I will be your God.' Ezekiel's language and imagery reflect the baptismal celebration on which the Vigil is founded.

Ro. 6:3-11: The earliest Christian baptismal fonts were probably the Jewish *mikveh* or ritual bath. Later, when Christians began to build their own baptismal font, it was modelled on the *mikveh*. The *mikveh* had to contain 'living water'. It was fed from a source of flowing water, e.g., a stream. The bather descended into the *mikveh* by steps so that it was comparatively simple to immerse the entire body in water and came out on the other side. For Paul, this total immersion in water was a symbolic death by which the believer enters into the death of Jesus. Coming up from the water symbolizes new birth. Unlike the ritual bath which had to be repeated, baptism is an unrepeatable experience. Just as Israel left Egyptian tyranny behind in the waters of the Red Sea, Christians leave their old life behind.

Mt. 28:1-10: There are two main types of Easter narratives – 1. Visit to the tomb of Jesus and finding it empty, and 2. Appearance of the Risen Jesus to disciples either as individuals or as groups.

Matthew is an example of combining both types into a single narrative. He took over from his main source, the Gospel of Mark, the story of how some women disciples found the tomb empty except for an angelic messenger who tells them that Jesus is risen. Matthew's account of the burial of Jesus included setting a guard on the tomb to prevent the disciples stealing the body of Jesus and claiming that He was alive.

No Gospel narrative contains a description of the resurrection itself. This brief account is the nearest we come to it: 'And all at once there was a violent earthquake, for the angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled away the stone and sat on it.' We noted yesterday in the passion narrative how the earthquake is a code word in Matthew for a miraculous event beyond human power. Like the angel in Mark he prepares them for a meeting in Galilee to where the Risen Jesus has already gone.

Matthew concludes the events at the tomb with a brief story of the appearance of Jesus to the women (Mary of Magdala and 'the other Mary' – there are several Mary's mentioned in other Gospels, e.g., Mary of Cleophas, Mary of James and Joseph). It contains few details: Jesus greets the women as though He had come out to meet them, probably with the ordinary Semitic greeting *Shalom*. They fall before Him and clasp His feet – a detail that John will later use. They are sent as messengers to the brothers. The women are commissioned as the first to carry the Easter message: the Lord also directs them to gather the Church in Galilee.

HOLY SATURDAY

Holy Saturday is a day of waiting, a day of silence. Most Christian churches allow no celebrations on this day, including burials, weddings, Eucharist or Lord's Supper, etc. In some churches, communion is only offered to those in imminent danger of death! All this is a tremendous reminder of salvation by grace working through faith (waiting). Our Christian life is completely dependent upon the Lord's resurrection, but there is absolutely nothing we can do to make this happen. So we wait and meditate on the statement of the Apostles Creed: "He descended into hell."

- 1 Ponder Ps. 16 and Ps. 24. The "gates" mentioned in the latter psalm can refer to the "gates" of hell, which Jesus, the man with clean hands and pure heart, enters after His righteous death in order to liberate those who are held captive there.
- 2 Meditate on Ro. 6:3-11.

CROSS / CRUCIFIX

WHAT DOES THE CROSS MEAN TO ME?

Certain things in our world are so prevalent and so present to us that oftentimes our eyes simply overlook them. These objects blend into the background; we're desensitized to their impact. The beauty of a blue sky, the look on the face of a loved one, the fresh bloom of a spring lily — those are a mere sampling of the things we frequently and too easily take for granted, so they fail to affect us.

Perhaps the most powerful symbol that has been reduced to having the least impression on us is the cross. Although it's depicted on everything from the tops of our churches to the bottoms of our neckties, from the front of our checkbook covers to the rear windows on our cars, we rarely see its significance.

The cross is jewelry. It's common to catch a glimpse of the cross as nearly every type of accessory imaginable. It has been made into earrings, necklace charms, key holders, toe rings, lapel pins and even the more permanent decoration of tattoos. None of these are inherently irreverent by their nature, but their existence shifts the significance of the cross from a spiritual tendency to a fashion trend where the primary purpose is not to prophesize but to accessorize.

The cross is suffering. We're challenged to take up our own personal cross and carry it, to freely and willingly undergo the sacrifices we encounter in our ordinary existence. Accepting our cross, though, does not translate into tolerating abuse or oppression. Instead, it indicates we are to surrender our wants and wishes for the benefit of others and to humbly give of ourselves even when our desire might be to do otherwise.

The cross is death. A crucifix is a cross with Christ's body still hanging, beaten and defeated, from it. It highlights the death of Jesus. The fact that the cross is a form of execution is not glossed over or kept hidden. The spotlight in this scenario shines on the dying and remains on the torture and pain of Good Friday.

The cross is life. The cross also points to the resurrection of Easter Sunday, moving beyond the conquering of death to the triumphant promise of eternal life. This style of ornate décor does not display Jesus' physical body because the emphasis is that it cannot contain nor restrain Him. The cross is hope. Being united and joined with Jesus is not reserved only for the next life, but is for the here and now. It is a calling for us to decide to live as Christians and to trust in the promise that we will be given the strength to do so. It is a commitment to remain steadfast to our faith no matter how difficult the trials become. It is clinging to the belief that through the aid of the Lamb of God we, too, can endure and continue on like a lion.

The cross is identity. The cross serves as a reminder of these characteristics of our religion and functions as a representation to the world of who we are. It classifies us as followers of Christ. As the body of the church, we are to embody anything the cross is and everything that it stands for — to become so close and familiar with the cross that our words and actions ought to be constantly guided by it, while still remaining distant and foreign enough to it that we can recognize its freshness and innovativeness; to always have our gaze fixed upon it, but to never lose focus of its meaning.

WHY IS THE CRUCIFIX IMPORTANT FOR ROMAN CATHOLICS?

So why is the crucifix, a cross which holds an image of the crucified Jesus, so important in our Catholic tradition? Many non-Catholics say Jesus is risen and having an image of the suffering Jesus on the cross takes away from the power of the Resurrection. And others argue we are keeping Jesus on the cross. Catholics are no more keeping Jesus on the cross than all Christians keep Jesus an infant when they display statues or figurines of a baby Jesus in a manger at Christmastime.

The reasons for crucifixes over crosses are many and are deep and are beautiful much like the whole of the Catholic faith. With crucifixes, we see sacrifice, commitment, redemption and most of all love.

Sacrifice

As Catholics we agree with all Christians that God sent His only Son, Jesus Christ to take away the sins of the world. He was crucified and died to fulfill His father's will. The fact that Christ suffered and died in the most horrific way imaginable serves as a lesson that our sins are no small thing. Indeed, our salvation is the result of a willing sacrifice by the very Son of God Himself who chose to endure so much suffering freely because He so loved the world.

Yes, we believe in and trust what comes after the cross. We believe in the Resurrection and that we too will be with Jesus in heaven one day. However, we must make sacrifices here on Earth to serve God, serve our family and to serve those less fortunate than us. The crucifix

reminds us that the Christian journey is not all comfort and success. It involves very real sacrifice. Like Jesus, we must sacrifice our time, our money, our possessions, and sometimes even our lives.

Catholics know that the crucifixion of Jesus was a one-time event. But it is an event that should never be forgotten. The image of the crucifix, whether it is placed in our homes, our churches, our schools or around our necks, makes sure that we are always reminded of His sacrifice. His suffering and dying should not and is not looked at as a defeat...it is a triumph.

Commitment

Christ fully committed to us by offering Himself up on that cross. Catholic tradition is steeped in the fullness of commitment. Look no further than to religious vocations to recognize this. Many religious take lifelong vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and spend their entire lives in absolute service to the Church. The crucifix represents, among other things, our level of commitment to Christ.

Spiritually speaking, the crucifix can also help us better commit our lives and live the words of Christ when He said, "deny yourselves, take up your cross daily, and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24). When some type of suffering comes our way, the image of the crucifix gives us spiritual strength and inspiration to live out our commitment to Him.

Redemption

Jesus came to be the Lamb of God who took away our sins and redeem the world. While we, as Catholics, believe that our Lord is risen, you can't have the resurrection without the crucifixion. We need to be reminded of what Christ had to endure before the Resurrection could take place, namely his Passion and Death on the cross. The crucifix helps us better understand and appreciate our theology of redemption. The open arms of our Savior on the cross gladly welcome and receive us into His Presence. After all, we are saved by Jesus, and not by a cross.

Love

The use of the crucifix is not trivial, nor is it a morbid preoccupation with Christ's Death. With it we are reminded of how much Jesus loved each of us individually and as a human race as he hung upon that cruel Cross that was transformed from a sign of torture, to the sign of salvation of all Mankind. One cannot look at a crucifix without seeing Great Love. For, as Christ said, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." -John 15:13. Crucifixes depict this 2000 year old, and yet timeless Sacrifice of Love to save all men.

He loved us so much he endured all of that for our sake! And that is what we are proclaiming when we display and venerate the crucifix. LOVE!

Liturgical Tradition

Because of all the reasons above, the crucifix plays a special role in the liturgical tradition of the Catholic Church. In most of our parish churches, the crucifix is given a place of honor and prominence, usually located centrally above the altar or tabernacle. When you walk through the doors of the church, the crucifix is one of the first things that grabs your attention: The open arms of our Savior gladly welcoming and receiving us into His Presence.

The Church requires that a crucifix be visible during the celebration of Mass to remind us of the sacrifice of Jesus on the altar of the cross, which is made present for us each time we celebrate the Holy Eucharist. A simple cross doesn't have the same visual or spiritual impact.

At Mass, we are really present at Calvary on Good Friday, and thus, it is the crucifix that intimately reminds us of such an amazing and startling fact. If you do not have a crucifix, perhaps it is time you owned one.

THE BLESSING of EASTER BASKETS: A CHERISHED CATHOLIC TRADITION

In many Eastern European countries, it's a tradition to have a basket of food blessed on Holy Saturday. This Catholic ritual has been cherished for centuries among many families. It has now been adopted by people of all ethnic backgrounds who enjoy this richly symbolic custom. The roots of this tradition date back to the 12th century early history of Poland, and is now observed by expatriates and their descendent Poles in the U.S., Canada and the U.K. and other Polish parish communities. However, the Eastern Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians, including Czechs, Croatians, Hungarians, Lithuanians, Russians, Slovaks and Ukrainians, also participate in this holy ritual.

What goes into a food basket depends on the region one is from and the family's preferences. Years ago in rural villages, it was a mark of one's wealth if a groaning basket of special, savory foods was presented to be blessed. However, these types of extravagant conspicuous displays are less common, and just a sample of many foods with symbolic meaning now line the baskets. Instead of hams, some Croatians and Slovenes place a lamb in their basket, and western Slovaks might place a veal loaf or a yeast bread made with veal in their baskets. In wine-making regions like Hungary and others, bottles of superior vintage go into the basket, and others add green vegetables to theirs. Balkan countries like Serbia, Bosnia, Bulgaria and some others exchange eggs on Easter morning rather than have a basket of blessed food.

Since Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians fast during Lent, none of the blessed food is eaten until after Mass on Easter Sunday. This then becomes the traditional Easter breakfast. Generally, each member of the family eats a sample of everything that is in the basket.

The blessing of the food is a festive occasion. People take special pride in preparing a decorative and tasteful basket with crisp linens, possibly embroidered for the occasion, both lining the basket and covering the food which symbolizes the covering of Christ's burial shroud. These covers are usually passed down from generation to generation. The basket could also be decorated with colorful ribbons and greenery, pussy willows or dried flowers to symbolize spring, renewal and the Resurrection. The creativity of the parishioners brings a special joy to this event. Children are eager to help prepare and decorate the family basket and proudly carry it into the church. Some families with small children carry their own decorated basket filled with fruits, a chocolate bunny or some other treats. In some parishes, baskets are lined up on long tables; in others, parishioners process to the front of the altar carrying their baskets or line the aisle next to the family who brought the basket to church.

While tastes vary by region and family, the basket usually contains smoked meats, sausage, butter, cheese, bread, salt and decorated, colored pysanky eggs. A white candle symbolizing Jesus, the light of the world, is placed in the basket so it can be lit during the blessing. Another local tradition is to tie two nails together in the form of a cross and place them in the basket. 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.

The practice of blessing the Easter food baskets has grown over the past ten years and it is unfortunate that this year we cannot gather at the church on Holy Saturday afternoon to continue this tradition along with the Easter Egg Hunt. However, we will gather this year in spirit as we ask God's blessing on your food items. A live stream blessing service will be held at 12 Noon on Holy Saturday.

PRAYERS

Holy Thursday

Prayer to Appreciate the Mass

O Lord Jesus,
in order that the merits of your sacrifice
on the Cross
might be applied to every soul of all time,
you willed that it should be renewed
upon the altar.
At the Last Supper, you said:
"Do this in remembrance of me."
By these words
you gave your apostles and their successors
the power to consecrate
and to the command to do what you yourself did.

I believe that the Mass is
both a sacrifice and a memorial-
reenacting your passion, death and resurrection.
Help me to realize that the Mass
is the greatest gift of God to us
and our greatest gift to God.

Good Friday

Prayer of Love for the Crucified Lord

O Jesus,
it is not the heavenly reward you have promised
which impels me to love you;
neither is it the threat of hell
that keeps me from offending you.

It is you O Lord,
it is the sight of you
affixed to the Cross and suffering insults;
it is the sight of your broken body,
as well as your pains and your death.

There is nothing you can give me
to make me love you.
For even if there were no heaven and no hell
I would still love you as I do!

Holy Saturday

Prayer to Be Joined with Christ in Death

O Lord,
your sorrowing Mother stood by your Cross;

help us in our sorrows
to share your sufferings.
Like the seed buried in the ground,
you have produced the harvest of eternal life for us;
make us always dead to sin and alive to God.
Shepherd of all,
in death you remained hidden from the world;
teach us to love our hidden spiritual life
with you and the Father.

In your role as the new Adam,
you went down among the dead
to release all the just there since the beginning;
grant that all who are dead in sin
may hear your voice and rise to new life.
Son of the living God,
you have allowed us through baptism
to be buried with you;
grant that we may also rise with you in baptism and walk in newness of life.

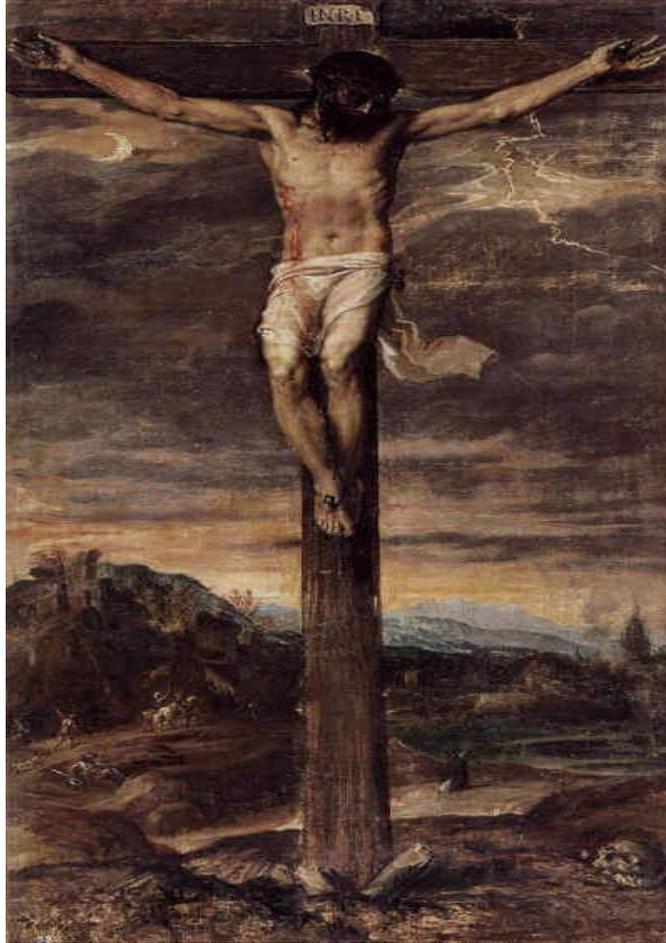
Easter Vigil

Prayer of Praise

Praised be the God and Father
of our Lord Jesus Christ,
he who in his great mercy gave us new birth;
a birth unto hope which draws its life
from the resurrection of Jesus Christ
from the dead;
a birth to an imperishable inheritance,
incapable of fading or defilement,
which is kept in heaven for you
who are granted with God's power through faith;
a birth to a salvation which stands ready
to be revealed in the last days.

1 Peter 1:3-5

Prayer Before the Crucifix



Look down upon me, good and gentle Jesus
while before Your face I humbly kneel and,
with burning soul,
pray and beseech You
to fix deep in my heart lively sentiments
of faith, hope, and charity;
true contrition for my sins,
and a firm purpose of amendment.
While I contemplate,
with great love and tender pity,
Your five most precious wounds,
pondering over them within me
and calling to mind the words which David,
Your prophet, said to You, my Jesus:
“They have pierced My hands and My feet,
they have numbered all My bones.” Amen.