

HOLY WEEK

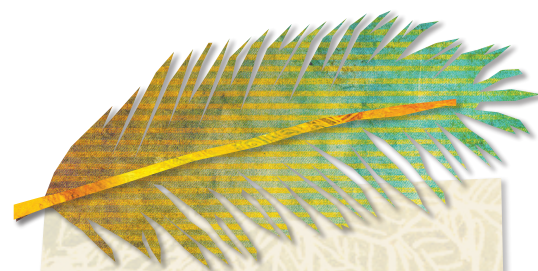
The days, the history, & the traditions

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The 40 days of the solemn season of Lent are winding down, and the observance of Holy Week begins with Palm Sunday.

These are the most sacred days in the Church calendar, a time of ritual, prayer and reflection which lead to the celebration of Christ's resurrection.

In 2016, Pope Francis described the importance of Holy Week to pilgrims at a special audience in Rome: "Let us allow ourselves to be enveloped by this mercy that comes to meet us. And in these days, while our gaze is fixed on the Lord's passion and death, let us welcome into our hearts the greatness of his love and ... in silence await the resurrection."



PALM SUNDAY (PASSION SUNDAY)

"The crowds preceding him and those following kept crying out and saying 'Hosanna to the Son of David.'"

Matthew 21:9

In the Bible

The Gospels describe Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem while riding on a donkey, as people waved palm branches to honor him.

Why it's important

It begins the events that lead to Christ's crucifixion and resurrection.

Current practices

At Palm Sunday Masses, people receive palm branches or crosses made from palms. Many churches hold special Palm Sunday processions to mark Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem. The Passion narrative from the Gospel is also read.



TUESDAY

"You set a table before me in front of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows."

Psalms 23:5

In the Bible

The ritual of anointing with sacred oil is mentioned in Psalms and the Gospels. Oil had a central role in daily life, from cooking to anointing the heads of guests and preparing bodies for burial.

Why it's important

In the Diocese of Charleston, the Tuesday of Holy Week is when the Mass of the Oils is held to consecrate the important holy oils used in sacrament. These three oils are the oil of the catechumens, used in baptism; oil of the sick, for anointing those who are ill; and the oil of sacred chrism, considered the chief anointing oil for the Church and used to bless new churches, altars and sacred objects.

Current practices

The Mass of the Oils or Chrism Mass is held in Charleston. The bishop consecrates the sacred oils and clergy renew their priestly vows.



HOLY THURSDAY (MAUNDY THURSDAY)

"Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel around his waist."

John 13:5

In the Bible

Gospels describe the events of Holy Thursday: Jesus eating the Passover meal, also called the Last Supper, with his disciples; his prediction of Judas' betrayal and Peter's denial; his agonized time of prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane and eventual arrest.

Why it's important

Holy Thursday commemorates the Last Supper and the beginning of the sacrament we now know as the Eucharist. Tradition also says this is when Christ established the priesthood.

Current practices

Priests wash the feet of lay people in a gesture of humility and service. The Last Supper is commemorated. Altars are stripped of decoration, churches darkened. Often, there is also a procession with the Blessed Sacrament and a period of adoration after the liturgy.



GOOD FRIDAY

"Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last."

Mark 15:37

In the Bible

The four Gospels offer a narrative of the heart wrenching events of this day: Christ's scourging, his agonizing walk carrying the cross, crucifixion and death on the cross, and then being laid in the tomb.

Why it's important

Good Friday is the most solemn day of the year in Church tradition, a time for the faithful to reflect on and commemorate Christ's ultimate sacrifice for their sake.

Current practices

Many people attend the Stations of the Cross. No Masses are held. Instead, churches hold Passion services which include the reading of the Passion narrative from one of the Gospels, veneration of a wooden cross, and Holy Communion. It is a day of fast and abstinence.



HOLY SATURDAY

"So they went and secured the tomb by fixing a seal to the stone and setting the guard."

Matthew 27:66

In the Bible

The only reference to Holy Saturday in Scripture is Matthew 27, which describes the chief priests and Pharisees meeting with Pontius Pilate on the day after the crucifixion. They ask for guards to be placed at Christ's tomb so no one may take his body away and later claim he was resurrected.

Why it's important

Holy Saturday is a time for prayer and reflection while traditionally Christ's body lies in the tomb. Tradition says this is the time when He descended into hell.

Current practices

No Masses are held during the day. No sacraments are generally offered except the anointing of the sick and sometimes confession. Communion may only be given to the gravely ill or dying. Holy Saturday lasts until dusk and the beginning of Easter Vigil celebrations.



EASTER SUNDAY

"They found the stone rolled away from the entrance to the tomb, so they went in; but they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus."

Luke 24:2-3

In the Bible

The four Gospels offer accounts of the early morning when Christ's resurrection was discovered by Mary Magdalene and other women who came to the tomb.

Why it's important

This is the most joyful day in the Church calendar because it reminds the faithful of the eternal life and hope that come through faith in Christ.

Current practices

Churches hold joyful Easter liturgies, many offered at sunrise or in the early morning. Outside the celebration of Mass, children hunt for and gather colored eggs symbolic of new life, and families gather for traditional meals.

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