



## The Paschal Triduum



The Easter Triduum (the “three days”) is the heart of our liturgical year and celebrates the heart of our faith, the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ: his life, passion, death, and resurrection. One long feast, it goes from sundown to sundown beginning with the Mass of the Lord’s Supper, through Good Friday, reaching its high point in the Easter Vigil, and closing with evening prayer of Easter Sunday.

### **Holy Thursday Evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper**

Flowers decorate the sanctuary. The three oils – consecrated Chrism and the blessed Oils of the Sick and of Catechumens – are brought forward, and the Gloria is once again joyfully sung. The Liturgy of the Word, from Exodus, Psalm 22, and Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians, leads to John’s narrative of the Last Supper. Paul gives Jesus’ words of blessing over the bread and cup, “Do this in remembrance of me,” while John tells us what the “this” is that Jesus commanded us to do: to act as he did, to wash one another’s feet, to break and pour ourselves out in love for one another. This life of charity is ritually symbolized in the Washing of the Feet, the reaffirmation of Priestly Ministry, the Collection of Gifts for the Poor, the Prayer of the Faithful on behalf of those in need, and the Eucharistic sharing of the Body of Christ by the Body of Christ. No hosts come from the tabernacle.

While the church is stripped, ministers and assembly carry the Blessed Sacrament in procession and take it to a place of repose. There is a “vigiling” time of Adoration and Prayer as we “remain there and stay awake” for a while in anticipation of the day of the Lord’s Passion. Night Prayer at 11 PM will close this time of keeping watch. The Blessed Sacrament is removed and we leave in silence.

### **Good Friday Celebration of the Lord’s Passion**

The liturgy begins in solemn silence. The Passion narrative account of John, centered on the cross as instrument of death and exaltation and very different from the other Passion accounts, is proclaimed by three readers. Ten solemn orations or intercessory prayers allow the assembly to voice our involvement in the mission of Jesus Christ and of the Church. Thus the assembly takes up the cross of service.

The Cross is then venerated through two ritual actions. In the first, the priest, assisted by others if needed, carries the cross in procession from the entrance of the church, to the center, to the entrance of the sanctuary. We are asked to behold and worship the bare wood of the cross in three “stations”, a parallel to those of the Easter Vigil proclaiming “the Light of Christ” with the Paschal Candle. Second, the assembly is invited from all sides to worship the cross, the tree of salvation, with a simple sign of reverence – a kiss, a profound bow, or hands or forehead gently touching it. With that sign, we entrust ourselves to God’s tender mercy and commit ourselves to a cruciform life. The cross is then enthroned.

A simple distribution of Communion with the reserved Sacrament follows. After a concluding collect and prayer, all leave in silence to await the paschal feast on Easter night and morning.

### **Holy Saturday Great Easter Vigil**

*This is the Night!* This is the night when Christ breaks silence and Light dispels darkness. The Easter fire is blessed and the Paschal Candle prepared. We are reminded of the wood of the cross by location and proclamation as three times the Paschal Candle is raised and we proclaim Christ as our Light. The Exsultet, the great hymn of thanksgiving, is sung from the ambo.

The Easter Vigil is a family reunion of the People of Israel, of Christ, of this parish community; it is the time to hear our common heritage. We retell our story as it has unfolded from the very beginning of creation. The collection of readings is long – Genesis, Exodus, Isaiah, Baruch, Ezekiel, Romans, and the Gospel of Matthew. Those readings walk us through salvation history, draw us into the Paschal Mystery, and usher us into the Resurrection in the Gospel’s proclamation.

The Liturgy of Baptism follows the homily, as does the Sacrament of Confirmation. We are all called to renew our baptismal promises and return to the font to bless ourselves and one another. And finally, the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the culmination of our lives as Catholic Christians to which the newly baptizes are invited for the first time, invites us to remember the new life of Jesus’ resurrection.

The night is long! But how could we tell thousands of years of history, welcome new members to our Christian community, share Eucharist with them, and celebrate the Resurrection in only one hour? As Psalm 118 says, “This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad! Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!”

### **Easter Sunday**

Easter Sunday retains many of the Vigil elements and adds the singing of the Sequence before the Gospel. It concludes the celebration of the Triduum and begins the Octave of Easter and the great Fifty Days until Pentecost. The starkness of our Lenten liturgies now gives way to the glorious excess of Easter!

