



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In this letter I offer you an overview of the liturgies of Holy Week (April 9-16) but you'll only begin to truly understand Holy Week by participating in its liturgies. As you've heard me say before: These are the most important and beautiful of all the church's liturgies - it's a shame that so many Catholics go through their whole lives without having experienced them. If you've never been, you don't know what you're missing!

In the week we call holy, the Church celebrates the most ancient and beautiful rites in its spiritual heritage. These are the most important days of the whole church year, even though they don't get tagged as "holy days of obligation."

Holy Week begins with ***Passion Sunday (Palm Sunday)***. With different degrees of solemnity and procession, we will commemorate the Lord's Entrance into Jerusalem at each Mass and recount the story of the suffering and death of Jesus as found in the gospel. This year we will hear the Passion according to St. Matthew. The story of Christ's suffering and death is proclaimed on only two days of the year: ***Passion Sunday*** and ***Good Friday***.

Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of Holy Week are the final days of Lent and most dioceses will celebrate the ***Chrism Mass*** early in Holy Week. At this Mass at the cathedral church, the bishop blesses and consecrates the holy oils that will be used for the year beginning at Easter. A bus will take interested parishioners into the cathedral in Boston, leaving the church parking lot at 9:00 a.m. If you'd like a seat on the bus (no charge) please call the parish office at 978-369-7442.

Lent ends at sundown on Thursday of Holy Week when we enter the ***Paschal Triduum*** (pronounced 'trid-oo-um, it means 3 days). The Triduum is one feast, celebrated over three days.

The "three days" are numbered from sundown Holy Thursday to sundown Good Friday; from sundown Good Friday to sundown Holy Saturday; and from sundown Holy Saturday to sundown Easter Sunday. The liturgical moments of that one feast are:

- The *Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper* on Thursday night at **7:30 p.m.** includes: the presentation of the holy oils blessed at the cathedral; the Washing of Feet; and the procession with the Eucharist to the altar of repose (in the lower church). Prayer before the reserved sacrament will continue until **midnight** and you are welcome to come back later in the evening to spend some time with the Lord on the night when he prayed in the garden on the eve of his suffering and death.

- The *Celebration of the Lord's Passion* on Friday night at **7:30 p.m.** includes the Word liturgy (3 scripture readings), the Solemn Intercessions, the Veneration of the Cross and communion from the reserved sacrament. We will also have a children's service on Good Friday afternoon at **4:00 p.m.**

- The *Easter Vigil* (the first and greatest Mass of Easter) on Holy Saturday night, includes the lighting of the fire (outdoors) and a candle light procession into the church led by the deacon carrying the new Paschal Candle; in the church Easter Proclamation is sung by candlelight; the Liturgy of the Word, in full, includes 9 scripture readings; at this year's Easter vigil three adults (Chris Morse, Sylvia Sawyer and Philip Coffin) will make a profession of faith, be confirmed and receive Communion for the first time. These three are already baptized in other Christian denominations and, at the Easter Vigil, will be received into full communion with the Catholic Church.

Our Easter joy overflows in the celebration of the Eucharist on *Easter Sunday morning*. Because of the many, many people who will come to pray our Easter Sunday Mass schedule will be **7:30, 9:30 and 11:30**.

Yes, some of these liturgies are lengthy but they are also rich and beautiful in symbol, ritual, prayer, and song. Know that *you* are invited to celebrate this great Paschal feast! Set aside these hours to give thanks and praise to the One who set aside his life for us that we might have forgiveness of our sins and the gift of God's peace.

Sincerely,
Fr. Fleming