

THE SACRED TRIDUUM

The Easter Triduum begins on *Holy Thursday* with the *Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper*, is continued through *Good Friday* with the celebration of the *Passion of the Lord* and on *Holy Saturday* it reaches its high point in the *Easter Vigil*. The Season of Lent ends on Thursday of Holy Week. Then the Church remembers the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus during the Easter Triduum. These three days are the most important time of the Church year and as Catholics we are encouraged to attend all three celebrations as it is a complete Liturgy celebrated over three days and in three parts. These three essential parts make up the Paschal Mystery of our faith.

HOLY THURSDAY: On Holy Thursday, we remember the Last Supper and that Jesus gave Himself in the Eucharist. We recall that Jesus chose His Apostles to serve and lead the Church. Remembering that Jesus washed their feet at the Last Supper, the priest washes the feet of members of the congregation. Holy Thursday is a special day for all priests since it is a day to mark the beginning of the Ordained Priesthood. The evening Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday is a beautiful and joyful celebration. Holy Thursday is also a Feast day of the Blessed Sacrament and there is a procession of the Eucharist after the Mass to the altar of repose in the Chapel. Then the main altar is then stripped bare. Mass is celebrated only once in any church, in the evening, to recall the Last Supper. The washing of the feet of several people before the altar, vividly recalls Jesus washing the disciples' feet. This action is the perfect expression of God's purpose in the Incarnation and Redemption, because washing the feet of others expresses readiness to suffer and to die, both in Jesus and in us. After the Mass the Blessed Sacrament for the next day's Communion is left at the altar of repose, where people can pray before it until later that night, in response to our Lord begging the disciples to watch with Him in Gethsemane.

GOOD FRIDAY: On Good Friday we remember the Death of Jesus. According to an ancient custom, Mass is not celebrated nor are any other Sacraments of the Church celebrated on this day or before the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday. The celebration of the Lord's Passion and Death takes place in the afternoon. There are three parts to the Liturgy of this day: the Liturgy of the Word; the Veneration of the Cross; and Holy Communion with Hosts consecrated on Holy Thursday. The solemn liturgy of the day takes place in the afternoon, at the time of Christ's death. It has no splendour and no happy hymns. The first part begins with reading of the Passion according to St John, the shortest of the four accounts of the Lord's trial and death. It is also the most dramatic and affecting. It contains more of the dialogue between the Lord and Pilate about Christ's kingship; Our Lady at the Cross; Christ's thirst; and the blood and water flowing from His side after death. It is followed by solemn prayers for the whole world. The second part is the unveiling of a big wooden cross. Everybody is invited to kneel before it and kiss it, as an act of love and faith. The third part is the saying of the Lord's Prayer. Holy Communion for all, in the form of the Sacred Body only, follows as an act of union with the Crucified Lord.

HOLY SATURDAY / EASTER VIGIL: On Holy Saturday the Church meditates on the Suffering and Death of Jesus. No Mass is celebrated on this day. The quietness dramatically reminds us of Christ's body resting in the tomb. But when darkness comes, we hold the most important and most beautiful Liturgy of the whole year. Then the Church gathers to celebrate the Easter Vigil. The celebration of the Easter Vigil takes place after dark. The Easter Vigil has four parts: The Service of Light; the Liturgy of the Word; the Liturgy of Baptism; and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. We begin outside the Church for the blessing of new fire, from which the Paschal Candle, decorated with five grains of incense to commemorate Christ's wounds, is lit. The Paschal Candle is carried into the dark Church. It is a sign of Christ, the Light of the World, who has overcome the darkness of sin and death. The lighted Paschal Candle provides the only illumination. From this great Candle the darkness is dispersed by lighting everybody's hand – held candles from it. Thus, the light of Christ fills the whole world, carried by Christians. During the Service of Light, all the lights in the Church are turned off and remain so until the *Gloria*. The light from the Paschal Candle and all the small candles provides the only illumination in the Church during this part of the Liturgy and the Old Testament Readings. The Exsultet, the Easter Proclamation is sung. During the Liturgy of the Word, the story of God's great love for us is proclaimed in readings from the Old and New Testaments. There are four Old Testament texts. The readings recall the great events of salvation, beginning with Creation itself and are selected to help us to celebrate the Sacraments of Christian Initiation. During the Liturgy of Baptism, the new Baptismal water is blessed and all present stand with lighted candles and renew their Baptismal promises as a sign that they share the new life of Jesus through His Resurrection. The Easter Vigil concludes with the celebration of the Eucharist. This is a joyous sharing in the sacrificial meal of Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Risen Saviour. This is the day of all the year.

"40 - 3 - 50": After 40 days of preparation during Lent, there are these 3 days of intense celebration of the Lord's Pasover, followed by 50 days of joy and feasting until Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit.