

THE GREAT THREE DAYS

KEY TERMS:

- *Triduum* – the “three days” commemoration of Jesus’ passion, death and resurrection
- *Holy Thursday* – the first day of the Triduum that celebrates the memorial of Passover and the institution of the Eucharist and the priesthood.
- *Passover* – the celebration of God sparing the Israelites from death and freeing them from slavery in Egypt.
- *Good Friday* – the second day of the Triduum commemorating the Passion and Death of Jesus.
- *Veneration* – to esteem or to honor
- *Holy Saturday* – the third day of the Triduum that calls us to patiently wait and hope in Christ’s Resurrection.

WHAT IS THE TRIDUUM?

In the Church we have a liturgical season that commemorates Jesus’ Passion, Death, and Resurrection. We call this the Triduum. The Triduum starts with Mass on the Thursday before Easter (Holy Thursday), continues all day Friday (Good Friday) and Saturday (Holy Saturday), and culminates with the Easter Vigil celebration Saturday evening. The Triduum is the shortest liturgical season—it only lasts three days.

The Triduum helps us prepare for Easter, which is the greatest and most central celebration during the whole liturgical year—even greater than Christmas! Because the Triduum helps us prepare for Easter, the three-day season is the holiest and most sacred time of year. It reminds us that God loves us so much that He sent His Son to die for our sins so that we could have new life in Christ and be with God in heaven. It’s easy for us to forget over the course of the year why Christ came and died. The Triduum helps us remember and give thanks to God for Christ’s sacrifice.

WHAT WE CELEBRATE ON HOLY THURSDAY

On Holy Thursday we celebrate three great events in our Church— Passover, the institution of the Eucharist, and the institution of the priesthood. These events are remembered within the celebration of the Holy Mass in the proclamation of the Scriptures.

PASSOVER

In Exodus, we hear about the first Passover when Moses instructed the Israelites to apply blood of a sacrificial lamb to the door of every house. The angel of the Lord would pass over that house and not bring death to their families. The Jewish people continued to celebrate this great feast of the Passover for many centuries. On Holy Thursday Christians remember this Passover and celebrate Christ as our sacrificial lamb. Christ’s blood was shed so that death might “pass over” our lives. We remember Christ as the “Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”

INSTITUTION OF THE EUCHARIST AND PRIESTHOOD

Saint Paul reminds us of the words Jesus spoke to His apostles at the Last Supper while celebrating the great Jewish feast of Passover: “This is my body...this is the new covenant in my blood.” At the Last

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Supper, Jesus gave the bread and wine to His apostles, not as a symbol or sign of love, but as His actual body and blood. We celebrate this moment as the institution of the Eucharist. In this same moment, Jesus charged His apostles to, “Do this in remembrance of me.” He instructed His apostles to continue what He did by celebrating and remembering Him in this specific way. He gave them the authority to make bread and wine into His body and blood. This is the institution of the priesthood.

SIGHTS AND SYMBOLS

The Triduum is full of many sights and symbols. The Triduum has two primary liturgical colors – white and red. On Holy Thursday, white is the primary color. The priests’ and deacons’ vestments are white. The altar cloth and other sanctuary dressings are also white.

WASHING OF THE FEET

Another “sight” of Holy Thursday is the washing of the feet. At the Last Supper, Jesus gave His disciples a new commandment: Love one another. After Jesus gave them the new commandment, He showed them how to love one another—He washed their feet. During Mass 12 representatives from the community are selected to have their feet washed by the priest. We remember Christ’s commandment and our call to love and serve each other by humbling ourselves and loving each other as Christ does.

LIVING HOLY THURSDAY

Holy Thursday is filled with many opportunities to grow in holiness. We learn from Holy Thursday that humility is the center of service and love. We can live Holy Thursday every day by thinking of others before ourselves, especially in our own families. We can also learn to be thankful to God for the many gifts He has given us, especially the gift of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist and the priests who serve the Church. This week, spend time in prayer giving thanks to God for all the ways He blesses your life and for the great celebration of Holy Thursday.

WHAT WE CELEBRATE ON GOOD FRIDAY

The second day of the Triduum is Good Friday. On Good Friday we commemorate the Passion and Death of Jesus – a death that was freely chosen for you and me. Every scourge, every step on the way to Calvary, every nail that pierced Jesus’ skin was for our sin and for us.

So, you might be asking yourself, “How can we call a day that Jesus died good? How can death be good?” St. Paul tells us that “the wage of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” This day is GOOD because we, for the first time since Adam and Eve, have gained access to the Father in heaven and eternal life.

Christ’s death is a free gift—a gift we didn’t earn or deserve. It is a gift of deep, unconditional love of a Father for His children. He desires so deeply for us to be with Him in heaven that He would submit to anything, “even death on a cross” as St. Paul tells us.

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When you go to church on Good Friday for the service, you will notice that the church is empty of all its decorations, and Jesus is removed from the tabernacle. The priests and deacons wear red on Good Friday to symbolize Christ's death. The Church does not consecrate the Eucharist on Good Friday, therefore Mass is not celebrated.

One symbol of Good Friday is that we fast—just like we did on Ash Wednesday—from food and drink for the whole day. We fast on Good Friday so that we can be in deeper communion with Christ and His sacrifice on the cross.

VENERATION OF THE CROSS

One of the most unique aspects to Good Friday is a tradition called Veneration of the Cross. The word “veneration” means “to esteem or honor.” After the Liturgy of the Word, each person comes forward one-by-one to venerate, usually by kissing, the cross. This is a time for us to worship God and thank Him for sending a source of redemption. As Christians we venerate the cross as sacred because it is the instrument of our salvation. The challenge for us is to embrace those areas in our own lives that at first can seem like a burden but in reality help us in our salvation. We are called to carry those crosses in our lives, just as Jesus did for us.

Good Friday is a celebration not only of the great victory over sin and death but also of the promise and hope that death is not the end.

WHAT WE CELEBRATE ON HOLY SATURDAY

The final day of the Triduum is Holy Saturday. Holy Saturday calls us to patiently wait and hope in Christ's Resurrection. Let's think a little more about the Scripture reading we just heard. Put yourself into the story. Jesus, who you love and trust, who said He would rise, and who you believe is the Messiah, is now dead and in the tomb. How do you think the women felt? How would you feel? We know how the story ends. But, what if we didn't? What if we were the ones at the tomb waiting to see what happens? Holy Saturday is a day of waiting in hope. The women waited at the tomb for Jesus to rise. Their waiting was not out of disbelief or fear but out of confidence and trust that Jesus, their Lord, was going to rise.

WAIT AND HOPE

During Holy Saturday we are called to wait and hope in Jesus. This is a day that the Church is silent. For many of us, silence and waiting is difficult. We are constantly surrounded by business, noise, and instantly having whatever we want. But, Holy Saturday calls us to turn all the noise off, focus our hearts on Jesus, and remain hopeful in His promises to us.