

Catechetical CORNER

Triduum

The season of Lent ends at sunset on Holy Thursday. As Lent comes to an end, the Paschal Triduum begins. These “three days” (the literal meaning of Triduum), extending from sunset on Holy Thursday through sunset on Easter Sunday, are the heart and culmination of the entire liturgical year. In these days, we remember and celebrate ever more intensely Christ’s Paschal Mystery, “since Christ accomplished his work of human redemption and of the perfect glorification of God principally through his Paschal Mystery, in which by dying he has destroyed our death, and by rising restored our life” (*Norms*, no. 18).

The first liturgy of the Sacred Triduum is the Mass of the Lord’s Supper, celebrated on the evening of Holy Thursday. This Mass celebrates the institution of the Eucharist, the institution of the priesthood, and Christ’s giving of the new commandment (“Love one another as I have loved you” [Jn 13:34]). After the homily, the celebrant may follow the example of Jesus and wash the feet of selected men.* Traditionally, the gifts brought forward during the Preparation of the Gifts include gifts for the poor as well as the bread and wine needed for the Eucharist. After the people have received Holy Communion, under both kinds if the bishop permits, the Mass does not conclude with the usual Blessing and Dismissal. Instead, the celebrant, ministers, and all the faithful join in processing the reserved Eucharist to an Altar of Reposition where the faithful may watch prayerfully until midnight.

On Good Friday, Mass may not be celebrated in accordance with the ancient tradition of the Church. No sacraments may be celebrated except Penance and

Anointing of the Sick. Instead, the liturgy of the day is the Celebration of the Lord’s Passion. This liturgy begins with the ministers’ silent entrance and prostration before the altar. The celebration has three parts. First, the Liturgy of the Word centers on the proclamation of the Passion according to John, followed by an extended form of the Intercessions. The second part of the celebration is the Veneration of the Cross, giving all due honor to the instrument of our salvation while remembering Jesus’ sacrificial love. In the final part of the celebration, Holy Communion is distributed to the faithful. Because Mass may not be celebrated on Good Friday, Communion is distributed from the hosts reserved from the Mass of the Lord’s Supper.

Holy Saturday is spent in silence, prayer, and vigil near the tomb of the Lord. After night falls, the Easter Vigil begins. The *Norms* for celebrating the Easter Vigil state:

The Easter Vigil, in the holy night when the Lord rose again, is considered the “mother of all holy Vigils” (St. Augustine, *Sermo*: 219: PL 38, 1088), in which the Church, keeping watch, awaits the Resurrection of Christ and celebrates it in the Sacraments. Therefore, the entire celebration of this sacred Vigil must take place at night, so that it both begins after nightfall and ends before the dawn on the Sunday. (*Norms*, no. 21)

The liturgy of the vigil begins outside the church with the blessing of the new fire and the preparation of the Paschal Candle. This candle will burn during all Masses throughout the Easter season as well as at Baptisms and funerals throughout the year. The faithful enter the church behind the Paschal Candle hailing Christ, the true light. This first part of the vigil ends with the proclamation of the Exsultet, an ancient hymn

* On January 6, 2016, the Congregation for Divine Worship issued a decree, *In Missa in Cena Domini*, indicating Pope Francis’s decision to change the current norm of the washing of the feet, so the rite would be ministered to “a small group of the faithful to represent the variety and the unity of each part of the people of God. Such small groups can be made up of men and women, and it is appropriate that they consist of people young and old, healthy and sick, clerics, consecrated men and women and laity.”

of thanksgiving for the candle and a reflection on the gift of salvation.

The second part of the Easter Vigil is an extended Liturgy of the Word. Nine readings are assigned, each with its own Psalm and prayer. The first seven readings, taken from the Old Testament, trace salvation history from the creation of the world to the time of the prophets. The Epistle is taken from St. Paul's Letter to the Romans and reflects on the mystery of Baptism and our incorporation into Christ. After the joyful proclamation of the Easter *Alleluia*, the Gospel recounts the Resurrection. While the number of readings from the Old Testament may be reduced for serious pastoral reasons, at least three, including the crossing of the Red Sea, should be used and their Responsorial Psalms sung.

In the third part of the Easter Vigil, the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation are celebrated. In addition to those adults and older children called to the Sacraments of Initiation at the beginning of Lent, parishes may choose to baptize infants and young children. A parish that is not celebrating Baptisms may simply bless the baptismal font and invite all present to renew their baptismal vows. Typically, adults baptized at the Easter Vigil are confirmed at the vigil as well. In addition, the vigil provides an opportunity for many parishes to receive candidates into the full communion of the Church. Such candidates renew their baptismal

promises, make a profession of faith, and, usually, are confirmed. Candidates who have been validly confirmed previously (for example, in the Orthodox Church) are not confirmed again. The Easter Vigil concludes with the celebration of the Eucharist where the newly baptized and received are welcomed to the Eucharistic table for the first time.

Easter Sunday is the final day of the Triduum. In the dioceses of the United States, the faithful are invited to renew their baptismal promises, after which they are sprinkled with the newly blessed water. The Triduum concludes with the solemn celebration of the Vespers of Easter.

*O God, who on this day,
through your Only Begotten Son,
have conquered death
and unlocked for us the path to eternity,
grant, we pray, that we who keep
the solemnity of the Lord's Resurrection
may, through the renewal brought by your Spirit,
rise up in the light of life.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.*

(Collect, Easter Sunday of the Resurrection of the Lord, At the Mass During the Day, *Roman Missal*)