

Symbols & Rituals in the Triduum:

Holy Thursday, Mass of the Lord's Supper

We begin the Triduum with the celebration of the Mass of the Lord's Supper. The liturgical action that begins on Holy Thursday continues through Good Friday and culminates with the celebration of the Easter Vigil. The entrance antiphon for this day sets the tone for the three moments in the liturgical drama that will unfold as the Triduum progresses: "We should glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, for he is our salvation, our life and our resurrection; through him we are saved and set free" (Gal 6:14). With faith we celebrate the triumph of God's love fully revealed in the cross of Jesus Christ. Life conquers death. Hope once again is renewed.

Holy Oils

Every year the bishop consecrates the chrism and blesses the oils that will be used through the diocese. This takes place at the Chrism Mass, which is celebrated at the cathedral a few days before the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday. The liturgy is a reminder of the union between the bishop and the priests of the diocese.

In the evening, at the beginning of the Mass of the Lord's Supper, the Holy Oils are presented to and received by each local parish community. The Holy Chrism is used for the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders. It also is employed for the blessing of altars and churches. The Oil of Catechumens is used for strengthening those preparing for Baptism. The Oil of the Infirm is used for anointing those who are in need of healing of any kind.

White Vestments and Altar Cloth

Instead of the penitential color of purple, the priest wears white vestments and the altar likewise is covered. White is the color of resurrection.

Gloria

Throughout the season of Lent, the Gloria has not been sung, and at the celebration of Mass the use of the organ and other musical instruments has been curtailed. The bells of the church have not been rung. For the first time in forty days, the Gloria, musical instruments, and bells once again sound during this joyful celebration as we all sing of God's glory.

Readings

Scripture is the living Word and continues to touch our hearts and shape our lives today. In the first reading we hear the story of Passover. It is a reminder of the Jewish roots of our Christian faith. As Christians we believe that Jesus is our Passover. His life, death, and resurrection are the fulfillment of God's promise to save us from sin and death.

The Gospel tells the story of the Last Supper and how Jesus washed his disciples' feet. As followers of Jesus, we are commanded to do the same.

Washing of the Feet

The washing of feet after the homily recalls that Christ came "not to be served, but to serve" (Mt 20:28). The love that Christ has shown us, we are to show to one another. This humble gesture is a reminder that Christian charity, practiced by all members of the community, involves selfless and self-giving service of others. Love of God and love of neighbor, especially those most in need, are inseparable.

Bread and Wine

The primary symbol on Holy Thursday is the Eucharist, which recalls the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Just as the bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of Jesus, we, the Church, become what we eat as we grow in communion with God and with one another.

Procession at the End of the Liturgy

Unlike other Masses throughout the year, the celebration on Holy Thursday does not end with a dismissal and final blessing. The Blessed Sacrament is transferred to a chapel or other appropriate location so that the faithful may spend time in adoration and worship. We sing the *Pange Lingua* and the *Tantum Ergo*, praising God for the gift of redemption through Jesus which we recall at every Eucharist.

The liturgy does not end, but continues into the Celebration of the Lord's Passion the next day. The altar is stripped and all decorations are removed from the sanctuary in preparation for Good Friday. Once again, there is no singing or music and the Church bells remain silent as we keep vigil until Easter.

Symbols & Rituals in the Triduum: Good Friday, Celebration of the Lord's Passion

The second movement of the liturgical drama that is the Triduum is the Celebration of the Lord's Passion on Good Friday. On this and the following day, by a most ancient tradition, the Church does not celebrate the Sacraments at all, except for Reconciliation and the Anointing of the Sick. It is the only time of the year that Mass is not celebrated. Holy Communion, consecrated the night before, is distributed at the Celebration of the Lord's Passion.

Good Friday is a day of penance, abstinence, and fasting. Jesus, trusting God and out of love for each and all of us, willingly embraced suffering and death. We remember that the way to Easter is through the Cross.

Silence and Red Vestments

Today, the liturgy begins and ends in silence. Once again, we are reminded of the continuity of the liturgy during the Triduum. The presider approaches the altar and prostrates himself and all kneel in humble worship.

The priest is dressed in red, which recalls the color of blood and the sacrifice of the martyrs.

Readings

In the first reading the prophet Isaiah describes the suffering servant. God brings about the salvation of the people through the one who has been rejected.

The second reading from the Letter to the Hebrews speaks of Jesus our "great high priest" who is able to sympathize with our weakness.

The Gospel of John retells the story of Jesus' crucifixion. The Cross reveals God's glory. Instead of defeat and despair, it points to something more. This is what we believe as Christians. This is what we are called to live each day of our being.

General Intercessions

At the end of the Liturgy of the Word, we pray for the Church and the world using special intercessions handed down by ancient tradition. The universal scope of these prayers reminds us that Jesus died on the Cross

for the salvation of the whole world.

Veneration of the Cross

We approach the wood of the Cross and we venerate it by touching, bowing, or kissing it. We join our suffering with the Cross of Jesus and we watch others do the same. We are not alone. God has not abandoned us. Rich and poor, young and old, saint and sinner, we come to the Cross to find hope and be saved.



Symbols & Rituals in the Triduum: Solemn Vigil of Easter, Celebration of the Resurrection

On Holy Saturday the Church observes the “mother of all vigils” as we keep watch, celebrate the Resurrection of the Lord, and await his return in glory. The Easter Vigil is the culmination of the Triduum, the turning point of the liturgical drama that began on Holy Thursday and continued through Good Friday. To highlight its importance and solemnity, the Church permits only one Easter Vigil to be celebrated in each parish on Holy Saturday. White, the color of resurrection, is used throughout the liturgy to remind us of our new life through Jesus Christ.

Darkness and New Fire

Holy Saturday begins with the community gathering in darkness as we keep vigil, waiting and hoping. As we watch and pray, we experience the darkness, with all its fear, loneliness, and uncertainty. Yet, that darkness does not have the final word. Our Easter is near as the priest prays, “Make this new fire holy, and inflame us with new hope.”

Paschal Candle and Exsultet

From this new fire the Paschal Candle, representing Christ’s presence among us, is lit. As it enters the church, its light is shared with each member of the community. The light of Christ dispels the darkness of our world and of hearts and minds. The words sung during the Exsultet express our Easter joy and hope: “Exult, all creation, around God’s throne! Jesus Christ, our King, is risen! This is our Passover feast. . . This is the night when Jesus Christ broke the chains of death and rose triumphant from the grave. . .”

Readings

During this vigil we recall the story of God’s fidelity and love throughout history. As we retell our story, we remember who we are and we embrace what we can become through God’s love. As we listen to the readings we move from darkness to light. Again and again we hear the call to new life.

Creation, covenant, salvation, and redemption—these are the themes of the readings and psalms we hear this night. After the last reading from the Old Testament, the Gloria is sung as the candles are lit.

Joyfully, we stand and sing “Alleluia!” (a Hebrew word meaning “Praise the Lord!” that we have not heard throughout Lent) as we listen to the Good News that Jesus Christ is risen.

Waters of Baptism

In the waters of Baptism we died with Christ so that we might live with him in eternal life. On Holy Saturday and throughout the Easter season the blessed water reminds us of Christ’s death and our new life. At the Easter Vigil the catechumens and candidates receive the Sacraments of Initiation. During the Litany we ask the saints and all those in heaven to pray for the Church, especially those being baptized and confirmed. As one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church we profess our faith in God with those being received into the Church as we all renew our baptismal promises.

Holy Chrism

Those being confirmed are anointed by the Holy Chrism consecrated by the bishop and received by the local parish community on Holy Thursday. In the ancient world oil was used to strengthen and heal. The priest anoints the candidates for Confirmation with this chrism and lays his hands over each, praying that they may receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit so that they become more like Christ and build up his Body, the Church.

Eucharist

All our waiting and preparation, all the power and drama of this night’s rituals and symbols, culminate with the celebration of the Eucharist. We give thanks and praise for the saving work that God has brought to pass through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Light triumphs over darkness. God’s love has conquered sin and death. We’ve been nourished by Scripture, the Living Word of God. We’ve been renewed by the waters of baptism. Now we share in the Body and Blood of Christ and receive the new life God promises to us. At the end of Mass, we are sent forth to “go in peace and love and serve the Lord.” Our response is one of gratitude and praise: “Thanks be to God, alleluia, alleluia!”