

The Easter Triduum: The Summit of the Liturgical Year

The **Easter Triduum**, also known as the **Sacred Paschal Triduum**, is the most solemn and sacred time in the entire liturgical calendar of the Catholic Church. It spans three days, beginning on the evening of **Holy Thursday** and culminating on the evening of **Easter Sunday**. Unlike ordinary time periods, the Triduum is one continuous liturgical celebration that commemorates the most central mysteries of the Christian faith: the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. These three days are not simply a recollection of past events, but a living participation in the Paschal Mystery, drawing the faithful into the saving work of Christ in a unique and transformative way. As the *Roman Missal* affirms, “In the Easter Triduum, the Church celebrates the greatest mysteries of our redemption.”

The Triduum begins on **Holy Thursday evening** with the **Mass of the Lord’s Supper**, which brings to the forefront three deeply interwoven realities of the Christian faith: the institution of the Eucharist, the institution of the ministerial priesthood, and Christ’s commandment of love through service. This Mass marks the end of the Lenten season and the beginning of the sacred days of the Triduum. The liturgy is distinct in its tone, beginning with a sense of solemnity and awe as the bells ring out during the Gloria, a hymn not heard since the start of Lent. One of the most moving elements of the Holy Thursday liturgy is the ritual of the Washing of the Feet, known as the *Mandatum*, which reflects Christ’s humble service to His disciples as recorded in the Gospel of John. In a powerful gesture, the priest reenacts Jesus’ act of kneeling to wash the feet of others, reminding all of the call to servant leadership and sacrificial love. After the celebration of the Eucharist, the Blessed Sacrament is solemnly transferred to a place of repose, often elaborately adorned, where the faithful are invited to remain in silent adoration. This vigil recalls Jesus’ agony in the Garden of Gethsemane and invites each believer to respond to His question: “Could you not watch one hour with me?” The altar is stripped in silence after the liturgy, signifying the abandonment and desolation that Jesus experienced as He entered into His Passion.

On **Good Friday**, the Church enters into the mystery of Christ’s suffering and death with great reverence and silence. It is the only day of the year when the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is not celebrated. Instead, the faithful gather for the **Solemn Liturgy of the Lord’s Passion**, which unfolds in three parts: the Liturgy of the Word, the Veneration of the Cross, and the distribution

of Holy Communion. The Gospel account of the Passion according to Saint John is proclaimed with solemnity and depth, drawing the assembly into the final hours of Christ's earthly life. This is followed by a series of Universal Prayers, which express the Church's intercession for the salvation of the entire world, including prayers for the Pope, the clergy, catechumens, non-Christians, and even those who do not believe in God. The most poignant moment of the liturgy is the Veneration of the Cross, during which the faithful approach the cross in silence, kneeling or kissing it in adoration. This act signifies profound reverence for the instrument of Christ's redemptive love. Communion is then distributed from hosts consecrated on Holy Thursday, maintaining the link between the Last Supper and Calvary. Good Friday is also a day of fasting and abstinence, inviting all to enter more fully into the sacrifice of Christ. Though marked by sorrow, the liturgy is not without hope, for it celebrates the Cross as the throne of Christ's triumph. As the prophet Isaiah wrote, "By His wounds, we are healed," and through His death, life has come to the world.

Holy Saturday is a day of silence and contemplation, during which the Church waits at the tomb of Christ. It is a day unlike any other, suspended in stillness between death and resurrection. The mood is somber and meditative, echoing the ancient tradition that Christ descended to the realm of the dead to proclaim liberty to the captives. As an ancient homily proclaims, "Something strange is happening—there is a great silence on earth today..." No Mass is celebrated during the day, and the Church refrains from any liturgical celebration until the fall of night, when the solemn **Easter Vigil** begins. The Easter Vigil is the **climax of the Triduum and the highest liturgical celebration of the entire Church year**. The liturgy begins in darkness, outside the Church, where a new fire is blessed and the Paschal Candle, symbolizing the Risen Christ, is lit. This candle leads the procession into the darkened church, gradually illuminated by the light shared among the faithful. Once inside, the deacon or priest proclaims the **Exsultet**, the Easter Proclamation, a hymn of triumphant joy that praises the night in which Christ broke the chains of death and rose victorious. The Liturgy of the Word follows with up to nine readings from the Old and New Testaments, tracing salvation history from creation to the resurrection. After the homily, the Baptismal Liturgy begins, during which catechumens are baptized and confirmed, and the entire assembly renews their baptismal promises with heartfelt joy. The Liturgy of the Eucharist then resumes with great solemnity and rejoicing, as the Church celebrates the first Mass of Easter and

receives the Body and Blood of the Risen Lord. The Easter Vigil is a profound and mystical experience, full of symbolism and light, calling the faithful to newness of life.

Finally, on **Easter Sunday**, the Church continues the celebration of the Lord's Resurrection with immense joy and triumph. The Resurrection is not only the culmination of the Triduum, but the cornerstone of the entire Christian faith. The liturgy is marked by the singing of the Gloria, the renewal of baptismal promises, and the proclamation of the Gospel of the Resurrection. The empty tomb is a sign that death has been conquered, and the Risen Christ is alive forever. As Saint Paul writes in his Letter to the Romans, "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death... so we too might walk in newness of life." Easter Sunday affirms that sin and death no longer have the final word, and every believer is called to witness to the transforming power of the Resurrection.

In conclusion, the Easter Triduum is not merely a commemoration of historical events, but a sacred participation in the mystery of salvation. These three holy days offer the faithful an invitation to journey with Christ from death to life, from darkness to light. Through the liturgies of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, the Easter Vigil, and Easter Sunday, the Church enters into the heart of the Christian mystery and is renewed in faith, hope, and love. The Triduum is the source of all grace and the summit of all worship, reminding us that in Christ, all things are made new.