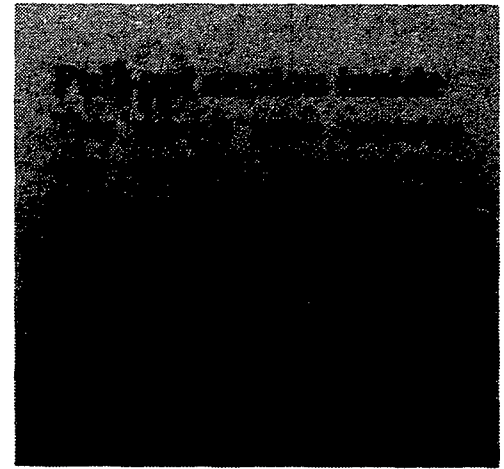




# CATHOLIC COURIER

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**C**hristmas is popularly perceived as the highlight of the Christian year, yet theologians unanimously state that Easter is the true heart of the Catholic calendar.

"From the very beginning of Christianity, the feast of the Resurrection of Christ was celebrated as the most important and festive day of the whole year," Ann Ball wrote in her book *A Handbook of Catholic Sacramentals*.

The commemoration of Christ's death and Resurrection actually extends over the three-day period stretching from Holy Thursday evening to Easter Sunday.

That period — known as the *Triduum*, from the Latin for "three days" — "is the culmination of the entire liturgical year," observes the *Source for Sundays and Seasons: An Almanac of Parish Liturgy*.

Indeed, in its 1988 Circular Letter Concerning the Preparation and Celebration of the Easter Feasts, the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship described the Triduum as the time during which the church celebrates "the Paschal mystery, that is, the passing of the Lord from this world to his Father. The Church, by the celebration of this mystery through liturgical signs and sacramentals, is united to Christ, her Spouse, in intimate communion."

Technically speaking, the Triduum is not part of Lent, which officially ends before the evening Mass on Holy Thursday, Father William O'Shea, OSB, noted in his book *The Meaning of Holy Week*.

The three days are marked by a series of services and sym-

bolic actions that developed over the centuries, especially during the church's early years, Father O'Shea observed.

Holy Thursday was not part of the church's original definition of Triduum, which included Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday, Father O'Shea explained. Instead, he noted, it was considered a day of preparation and of reconciliation for penitents.

By the fourth century, however, the day was described as the "Thursday of the Lord's Supper," and was marked by a Mass at about the hour that the Last Supper would have taken place, Father O'Shea observed. This evening Mass gradually became an official part of the Triduum celebration.

The Holy Thursday Mass recalls the Last Supper and, thus, commemorates "the institution of the Eucharist, the institution of the priesthood and Christ's command of Brotherly love," explained the Congregation for Divine

## The Triduum forms the heart of the year

Worship's letter.

Because the Mass recalls the first Eucharist, the letter continues, "The tabernacle should be completely empty before the celebration. Hosts for the communion of the faithful should be consecrated during that celebration."

Also commemorating the establishment of the priesthood, the service includes the washing of feet — modeled after Christ's washing of his apostles' feet.

In his book *Lent and Holy Week*, Father Vincent Ryan, OSB, noted that the washing of the feet at the Last Supper was, on one level, simply a gesture of hospitality typical of Jesus'

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