

The Triduum forms the heart of liturgical year

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time. On a deeper level, however, "The washing of the disciples' feet symbolised the supreme act of loving service for mankind, Christ's atoning sacrifice," he wrote.

At the conclusion of the Mass, the remaining hosts — consecrated for the Good Friday service — are taken to the tabernacle of a side altar or to some other repository away from the main altar. The main altar is then stripped, and crosses are removed or covered with purple or red cloths.

C.P.M. Jones explained in his *A Manual for Holy Week* that this stripping of the altar "suggests the stripping of Christ during his passion and death and serves to show the altar itself is a symbol of our Lord."

The second day of the Triduum, Good Friday, "is indeed a day of great sorrow, but it is also the day of our redemption," Father O'Shea noted, and hence it is called "Good."

The Good Friday service includes a liturgy of the word and distribution of hosts consecrated at the Holy Thursday Mass. The service also incorporates veneration of the cross.

Ball explained that the veneration of the cross "was adopted by the Roman Church from Jerusalem, where the true Cross of Christ was venerated every year on Good Friday from the fourth century. After the Muslims conquered Jerusalem in 1187, the relics were taken away and no trace of them was ever found." But by the time the true cross was lost, the practice of veneration had become a part of Catholic worship.

During the service, a large cross is brought into the church in a procession that includes three stops — or stations. In some churches, no procession takes place, but the cross, which is already located on the altar, is brought to the steps leading up to the sanctuary and uncovered three times.

Once the cross is placed at the front of the church, all those who wish to do so come forward and venerate in a number of ways — including bowing, genuflecting, kissing or touching it.

Father Ryan pointed out that the veneration of the cross takes the place of the eucharistic sacrifice and helps to bring "home to us the intimate relationship between the sacrifice of Calvary and the Mass. ... On this day the Church's gaze is fixed on Calvary itself where Christ offered his life in atonement for our sins."

The Good Friday service concludes with distribution of Communion. The altar is stripped bare again, but the cross remains, with lighted candles, for continued veneration and meditation.

That veneration and meditation continues into Holy Saturday, but no services are scheduled during the day. "On Holy Saturday," the Vatican congregation's letter notes, "the Church is, as it were, at the Lord's tomb, meditating on his passion and death and on his descent into hell, awaiting his resurrection with prayer and fasting."

The atmosphere of silent veneration and meditation ends that evening, however, with the Easter Vigil, which Jones described as "the climax and the center of the Church's Year."

The Easter Vigil begins with the church entirely darkened. When possible, a new fire is lighted outside the church, symbolizing the new beginning of the world at Easter, Father Ryan wrote.

From this fire is lit the paschal candle, which symbolizes Christ, Father O'Shea noted. It is decorated with a cross cut into its side; the Greek letters for *Alpha* and *Omega*; five markers to represent the wounds on Christ's head, hands, feet and side; and the year.

Once the paschal candle is lit, the celebrant begins to process into the darkened church. Members of the congregation along the central aisle begin to light their candles from the paschal candle, then to spread the flame from candle to candle throughout the church until everyone in the congregation is holding a lighted candle. "This conveys the idea that the light, which is Christ, must be communicated," Father Ryan wrote.

Today, the Easter Vigil also incorporates the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults and the renewal of baptismal vows by the entire congregation.

Father O'Shea observed that the Easter Vigil had originally developed with strong "baptismal coloring" and, by the fourth century, had evolved into the great "night of baptism." Although baptism could take place on other Sundays, he noted, "the full initiation into the Christian mysteries was reserved for this night alone."

This baptismal emphasis gradually faded as Europe became Christianized,

Father O'Shea reported, and consequently so did the celebration of the vigil. In 1951, the Vatican began restoring the vigil to prominence and re-emphasizing the service's baptismal aspect, he observed. Meanwhile, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults developed, and has become an integral part of the current vigil service.

The Triduum continues through the morning Mass on Easter Sunday. The paschal candle is to be prominently displayed during the day. Meanwhile, the renewal of baptismal vows — complete with sprinkling with Holy Water — can take place again.

The Triduum officially concludes with the vesper service on Easter. The vesper service, Father Ryan declared, is a fitting end to the Triduum with its prayers of "praise, thanksgiving and petition," including the Magnificat.

Father Ryan noted that the vesper service takes place at about the time Christ appeared to his disciples gathered together in the upper room in Jerusalem on the first Easter Sunday evening. The Magnificat antiphon recited during the service refers to this visit, during which Christ declared, "Peace be with you."

"It is on this note of peace," Father Ryan wrote, "that Easter Sunday draws to an end."

Ultimately, Father Ryan noted, the events and celebration of the Triduum reveal the paschal mystery to all. "Through his paschal mystery," he concluded, "(Christ) has restored peace between God and man."



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