

How Catholics Worship: What we do and why we do it.

The Sacred Triduum



Office of
Evangelization and Worship

The Sacred Triduum, from Holy Thursday to Easter Day, is the holiest time of the Church year. The Triduum is really one feast which embraces the entire history of our Redemption. In the passage from cross to resurrection, Christ redeems us and gives glory to God: by dying He destroys our death, by rising He restores our life. The “Great Three Days” or the Paschal Triduum is a unified observance that extends over three days and is therefore unique in our liturgical celebrations. The Sacred Triduum is the central part of our liturgical year as Catholic Christians.

Keeping these three days means – three full days lived as one central moment in the life of every Christian and of the whole Community. Understanding the Triduum as one three-day long liturgy can help us approach each of the various related moments within it.

They are Holy Thursday’s **Mass of the Lord’s Supper**, Good Friday’s **Solemn Liturgy of the Lord’s Passion and Death**, Holy Saturday’s **Great Vigil of Easter**, which continues until Vespers of the Resurrection. These three days are the glow of the feast to be enjoyed and savored. The Sacred Triduum is the central moment around which all else revolves. Because the Triduum leads us powerfully into the core of who we are in Christ, these days are to be observed as fully as possible. Throughout these days the Church will gather frequently for prayer and celebration, but these moments only mark the high points in a continued period of prayerful observance. Nothing distracts us from the spirit of these days as ONE Celebration, where the whole church is called to gather as the unified Body of Christ.

During the Sacred Triduum: The Liturgy of the Hours

Each morning of the three days might begin with the Church’s Prayer: the Liturgy of the Hours. The three days conclude with the Solemn Vespers of Easter on Easter Sunday.



The Sacred Triduum is central to our liturgical life.

Holy Thursday Evening: Mass of Lord's Supper

At the Last Supper, Jesus gave His death the significance of a living gift of Himself to God for all. Holy Thursday is celebrated with the full participation of the whole parish community, with all exercising their ministry. The washing of feet is a sign of our common service to one another in imitation of Jesus as well as following Jesus' mandatum (command) to love and serve one another. Following the Communion Rite, the Eucharist is carried in solemn procession to the Altar of Repose for a period of adoration which must end no later than midnight. All depart in silence.

Good Friday: Solemn Liturgy of the Lord's Passion

This is the main liturgy of Good Friday and it consists of three parts: The Liturgy of the Word, the Veneration of the Cross, and Holy Communion. The service begins with a prostration before the bare altar. Then follow the readings and the chanting of the Passion according to John. The general intercessions, sung in a solemn form on this day, as the church prays particularly for our sisters and brothers who share one baptism with us, but are of other Christian denominations; our Jewish sisters and brothers who were first to hear the word of God; for those who do not believe in Christ; and for those who do not believe in God. Then all are invited to come forward to venerate the cross of Jesus. Finally, the Blessed Sacrament is brought from the Altar of Repose and communion is shared with the faithful. All depart in silence.

Evening of Holy Saturday : The Easter Vigil

The Great Feast of Easter begins at this vigil. It is the Principal Celebration of Easter. The Vigil is arranged in four parts. The Service of Light, The Liturgy of the Word, The Liturgy of Baptism and Confirmation, and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Outside on the front steps of the Church (as appropriate), a fire is kindled from which the Paschal Candle is lit and carried into the Church at the head of the procession through the doors, after which the Easter Proclamation is sung. In the Liturgy of the Word, we listen to a series of Old Testament readings which remind us of the wonderful things God has done for God's holy people from the beginning. They are our stories which form the history of salvation. The Gloria and Alleluia resound with joy for the first time in forty days. In the Liturgy of Baptism and Confirmation, new members are welcomed into our faith community, and we recall our own rebirth in Christ. Then in the Liturgy of the Eucharist, all are called forward to the table which Christ has prepared for us through his death and resurrection.