

THREE HOLY DAYS

The Easter Triduum

The *Easter Triduum* is the three-day celebration of the death and resurrection of Christ - Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Vigil/Easter Sunday. The Church meets at times during those three days to remember what it is that Jesus has done for us. "The Easter Triduum of the passion and resurrection of Christ is the culmination of the entire liturgical year."

The Three Days, the Easter Triduum, is indeed, the centre, the core of the year for Christians. These are days to save and savor. Please, plan ahead so that the whole time from Thursday night until the Easter Vigil is free of social engagements, free even of work, free of entertainment, free of meals except for the simplest nourishment. We are asked to fast during Good Friday and to continue fasting, if possible, all through Holy Saturday as strictly as we can, so that we come hungry and full of excitement to the Easter Vigil. We make Good Friday and Holy Saturday free for prayer and reflection and preparation and silence. The church is getting ready. Whether you are young or old, currently active in the parish or not, please set these days aside. All of us should know that our presence for the liturgies is not by invitation. We are all needed here. All of us who make up the parish community of St Robert's need to be together on its greatest days. On these three days, we gather a number of times with each other. Together we hear some of the church's most beautiful prayers and scriptures and we make some of our finest music. We make plans to take part in the various liturgies and other gatherings of Holy Thursday night at 7.00pm, Good Friday at 3.00pm and Holy Saturday at 8.30pm. Above all, come at 8.30pm on Saturday night for the Solemn Easter Vigil.

Lent exists so that we can prepare ourselves for these three great days. What is remembered during these three days is so spectacular that it takes the Church fifty days to celebrate it. From the close of Easter Sunday until Pentecost we celebrate with great joy the fact that Jesus who died for us has risen from the dead. We need fifty days (Eastertide) to celebrate this great event – and indeed, we need a lifetime to express it. Let's not forget as well that every Sunday is a celebration of the Lord's resurrection. Thus we take forty days (Lent) to prepare, three days (Easter Triduum) to experience, and fifty days (Eastertide) to celebrate the great mystery of our faith. The Easter mystery is completed by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost – the birthday of the church.

The term Triduum means "three days." Each of those days "tells" a different part of the story of Jesus' saving action. On Holy Thursday we remember the Last Supper. Jesus gives us the Eucharist and tells us to "Do this in memory of me." He then washes the feet of the apostles and gives us his new commandment of love. On Good Friday we remember the passion and death of Jesus. We celebrate the resurrection of Christ either at the Easter Vigil on Saturday night or on Easter Sunday morning, depending on which celebration you come to.

We look at the Easter Triduum as one single celebration that lasts for three days. It is one Service in three parts. We do not spend all of the three days in church, but at various times during those days, we are called to church to gather and remember together. When we are not in church, we are asked to keep the spirit of those days even in our homes, if possible. Those days are not days of "business as usual."

Holy Thursday

The Triduum begins with the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper at 7.00pm. "With the celebration of Mass on the evening of Holy Thursday the Church begins the Easter Triduum, and recalls the Last Supper, in which the Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, showing his love for those who were his own in the world, he gave his body and blood under the species of bread and wine offering to his Father and giving them to the Apostles so that they might partake of them, and he commanded them and their successors in the priesthood to perpetuate this offering." We are celebrating three things in this Mass: "the institution of the Eucharist, the institution of the priesthood, and Christ's command of brotherly love." The sacred Scripture which we hear this night reminds us of the first Passover meal of the Israelites as they prepare for their journey out of slavery in Egypt. We then hear of the institution of the Eucharist by Christ and his call of "Do this, in remembrance of me." And then we have the wonderful example of the service to which we all are called when Jesus, who is Lord and master, takes a basin of water and a towel and washes the feet of his apostles ending with the words, "What I just did was to give you an example: as I have done, so you must do." Christ saves us from the slavery of sin, the Eucharist nourishes and strengthens us so that we can serve

our brothers and sisters. In order to reinforce this important teaching of Jesus, the parish priest washes the feet of 12 men. At the end of Mass we remember that after the Last supper Jesus, with his disciples walked from the upper room to the garden of Gethsemane where he experienced “the agony in the garden”. This is re-enacted by the procession of the Blessed Sacrament from the main altar of the church to the altar of repose which will be erected in the church hall. Here in the “garden of Gethsemane” we will remember Christ’s agony and his call “will you not watch one hour with me”. There will be watching until 11.00pm when Compline (Night Prayer) will be celebrated.

Good Friday

Something which has always set Good Friday apart is that it is a day of fast and abstinence. Because we are asked to fast on Good Friday, we often think of this day as part of Lent. But remember that Lent ended at dusk on Thursday. The fast of Good Friday is not the Lenten fast of discipline and repentance. It is the excited, nervous fasting of anticipation. “On this day, when ‘Christ our passover was sacrificed’ the Church meditates on the passion of her Lord and Spouse, adores the cross, commemorates her origin from the side of Christ asleep on the cross, and intercedes for the salvation of the whole world.” There is no Mass today.

The Solemn Celebration of Our Lord’s Passion begins at 3.00pm, the hour when Our Lord died. We begin the service in silence. This Service does not stand alone; it is a continuation of what began on Holy Thursday. The priests’ prostrate themselves as a sign of utter humility before God. During the Liturgy of the Word, the Passion of Christ is proclaimed. We listen and remember how Jesus suffered and died for our sins. After the Passion, the General Intercessions “follow the wording and form handed down by ancient tradition maintaining the full range of intentions so as to signify clearly the universal effect of the passion of Christ, who hung on the cross for the salvation of the whole world.” Then a crucifix, the symbol of our salvation, is brought forward for us to venerate. The veneration of the cross is a practice unique to Good Friday. It is our opportunity to humble ourselves before the awesome saving action of Christ. We approach the cross and venerate it with a kiss. For many centuries the veneration of the cross marked the end of the Service but in more recent times the Church has allowed us to receive Our Lord in Holy Communion today. The Blessed Sacrament is brought to the altar and Holy Communion distributed. The Service ends with a simple prayer. No blessing or dismissal, the Service continues tomorrow evening.

Holy Saturday

The Easter Triduum began with the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday; it reaches its high point in **the Easter Vigil, celebrated on Saturday night at 8.30pm.** This is the most important celebration of the Church’s year. It is the “Solemnity of Solemnities.” “According to a most ancient tradition, this night is ‘one of vigil for the Lord’ and the vigil celebrated during it, to commemorate that holy night when the Lord rose from the dead, is regarded as the ‘mother of all holy vigils.’ For in that night the Church keeps vigil, waiting for the resurrection of the Lord, and celebrates the sacraments of Christian initiation. The entire celebration of the Easter Vigil takes place at night.” We begin outside in the dark. A fire is burning to remind us that Jesus is our light in the darkness, and after lighting the new Easter candle from this first fire, we process it into the darkened church and hear the proclamation of Christ's resurrection. Our own candles are also lit. We then listen to the Scripture stories of God's interaction with humankind from creation through to the resurrection. This reaches its culmination in the singing of the “Glory to God in the highest” when the bells are rung and the church lights are switched on. The “Alleluia” is sung for the first time and the Easter Gospel is then proclaimed. After the homily it is the usual time for new converts to be received into the Church and for baptisms and confirmations to be celebrated. Unfortunately, this will not happen this year. However, the baptismal water will be blessed and everyone will renew their baptismal promises. Mass continues and we are strengthened with the spiritual food of the risen Christ’s body and blood.

Called by your baptism as a child of God, you need to experience the Easter Triduum. We need you here! To experience the fullness of the Triduum is to be present for the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday, the Solemn Liturgy of the Lord’s Passion on Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday evening. I look forward to celebrating the Triduum with you here at St Robert’s.

Yours,

Fr Lawrence Jones

(Quotations taken from *Celebrating Easter* by the Congregation for Divine Worship, Rome)