

THE JOURNEY

In *Great Lent*, Alexander Schmemmann writes that "even though we are baptized, what we constantly lose and betray is precisely that which we received at baptism. Therefore Easter is our return every year to our own baptism, whereas Lent is our preparation for that return—the slow and sustained effort to perform, at the end, our own 'passage' or 'pascha' into the new life in Christ. . . . Each year Lent and Easter are, once again, the rediscovery and the recovery by us of what we were made through our own baptismal death and resurrection."

The hinge that connects Lent and Easter is the very heart and soul of the Christian faith. That period of time from Sunday-to-Saturday is called "Holy Week," since it is during those days that we enter the events that accomplished our salvation. *Above all others, this is the time when Christians are to be most faithful in responding to God through worship.*

These services come to us from the practices of the earliest Christians. The liturgies form a sacred journey, by which we prepare ourselves for the greatest of all celebrations: Easter. Indeed, these several services are actually one protracted liturgy, and for full meaning we must go from start to finish. We cannot truly know the surpassing joy of Easter without taking part in those shattering events that led to Christ's death and burial.

Holy Week is emotionally draining. It is a time when – mystically – you become part of what happened during those last fateful days of Jesus' earthly life. From that, you will come to experience more meaningfully your sharing in His Resurrection.

Quote from Alexander Schmemmann, Great Lent (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1969).

THE SUNDAY OF THE PASSION: PALM SUNDAY

April 2

Holy Eucharist 8:30 a.m. and 10:45 a.m.

Today's liturgy is in two parts. The Liturgy of the Palms celebrates Jesus' entry into Jerusalem at the beginning of the week of his Passion. After we hear Matthew's account of that event, the celebrant gives thanks over the branches which we carry. In many congregations a procession with branches then moves into the church building, with festive songs of "Hosanna in the highest!" as we enact the event which led directly to Good Friday. The second part of today's liturgy changes from triumph to tragedy as it focuses on the suffering and death of Jesus. The account of the Lord's Passion is a reading from Matthew's Gospel, so that we may have a fuller sense of sharing with him in his redemptive acts of dying and rising for our salvation. Today we enter into the celebration of the mighty acts of God which brought about our redemption. During this week, we will rediscover what God has done for us, rediscover the meaning of our Baptism and rediscover the meaning of our sharing in the Eucharist.

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MAUNDY THURSDAY

April 6

Holy Eucharist and Stripping of the Altar in the Church
6:00 p.m.

Tonight's Eucharist—on the eve of Good Friday—begins the Sacred Triduum, or Three Sacred Days, of our redemption. This is a celebration: a celebration of our Lord's institution of the sacrament of his Body and blood; but it is pervaded by the shadow of the cross. Jesus gathered with his disciples in the context of the greatest of all events in Israel's redemption—the exodus and the Passover. Yet the normal joy of such an evening was muted by betrayal, the failure of his friends to understand what he was doing, and his own fear of what was to come.

It was at a farewell dinner that Jesus, by washing his disciples' feet, sought to illustrate one final time the character of love and ministry which is central in the life to which he calls us: self-giving love to the point of dying for one's friends. Through scripture, we hear the ancient instructions for celebrating the Passover, Paul's account of the institution of the Eucharist, and John's account of the moment when Jesus washed his disciples' feet. After Holy Communion tonight, the liturgy will not end. It continues tomorrow, Saturday, and Sunday, when it comes to its conclusion. We will take the Sacrament which remains tonight and place it on the Altar of Repose at the chapel next door to the church. You are invited to keep vigil there in response to Jesus' question, "Could you not watch with me for one hour?"

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GOOD FRIDAY

April 7

Good Friday Liturgy and Veneration of the Cross
12:00 p.m.

Today's liturgy is the second part of a complex series of rites which cover the Three Sacred Days of our redemption. This liturgy began last night and will be concluded on Sunday. We will engage in intense intercessory prayer for the church and for the world. It was on the cross that Jesus made his full intercession for us, and we are united with him through Baptism in that intercession. The final portions of this liturgy take place before a cross, where we praise Christ for his love, which he demonstrated on the cross. At the end of the liturgy, the church is left in silence and darkness, as we prepare for the final act, which begins at the Great Vigil on Saturday night. It is as though the church has died and now waits silently to be resurrected out of the baptismal font at the Great Vigil of Easter. Today we hear John's account in Holy Scripture of the Lord's trial, suffering, and death.

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HOLY SATURDAY

April 8

Liturgy of the Day
10:00 a.m.

"Something strange is happening—there is a great silence on earth today, a great silence and stillness. The whole earth keeps silence because the King is asleep. The earth trembled and is still because God has fallen asleep in the flesh and he has raised up all who have slept ever since the world began. God has died in the flesh and hell trembles with fear."

Holy Saturday, also called the Holy Sabbath and the Great Sabbath, is an empty day, the day when Christ rested in the tomb and all creation awaited the resurrection. *The Book of Common Prayer* has contained propers for a Liturgy of the Word on this day since 1549. With the church still bare, as on Good Friday, the people gather in silence to hear the propers appointed for the day, including the conclusion of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew, followed by the anthem "In the midst of life" from the Burial Office. All leave the church in silence.

Quote from an ancient homily, Office of Readings Holy Saturday Roman Rite, reprinted in A Triduum Sourcebook (Liturgy Training Publications, 1983) Adapted from Leonel L. Mitchell, Lent, Holy Week, Easter and the Great Fifty Days (Cowley Publications, 1996).

THE GREAT VIGIL OF EASTER

April 8

The Great Vigil of Easter
7:00 p.m.

We gather in the darkness of the night on which Jesus rose from the dead. This service is unlike any other service in the year. It is the Christian Passover feast, in which we celebrate the Passover of Jesus from death into life and our own passover from death into life in Holy Baptism. The service has four parts.

The Service of Light

We gather to kindle a fire to drive away the darkness, and from the new fire a large candle is lighted, called the *paschal candle*. As it is carried into the midst of our assembly the priest sings out "The light of Christ," and we respond "Thanks be to God." From this candle, the people light their own small candles, and the church is filled with the light of Christ. Then another singer sings the ancient hymn known as the *Exsultet*, which praises God for this night in which the ancient people of Israel were delivered from Egypt at the Red Sea, in which Christ rose from the dead, and in which we are baptized into his death and resurrection.

The Vigil

We then settle down, and with music punctuating the readings, we hear a number of passages from the Old Testament which cover the major events of salvation history. Each reading is followed by a collect which relates the reading to our salvation and our Baptism.

Baptism / Renewal of Baptismal Vows

By reminding us of our sacred story, the readings have reaffirmed our identity as the people of God, the Body of Christ. Now we initiate new members into the church by water and the Holy Spirit. It is in the rising of the newly baptized from the waters of Baptism that the Resurrection of Christ is renewed in our midst. When we, the members of his Body, stand in prayer, the Body of Christ is risen and made visible to the world. We also recall our baptisms and renew the promises and vows we made at our baptisms.

Holy Eucharist

This is *the* Eucharist of the year—the one of which all our other Eucharists are repetitions. In this Eucharist, Paul reminds us that in Baptism we have died with Christ in order that we may be raised with him, and we hear Matthew’s account of the women who had come with Jesus from Galilee bringing spices to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus, only to be told that Jesus was risen from the dead. In sign and Sacrament, holy story and song, the dying and rising of Jesus in the midst of the people is once again enacted. Sharing in the holy gifts of the altar, we find ourselves made one with Christ and rejoice in this foretaste of the glory of God’s kingdom.

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THE SUNDAY OF THE RESURRECTION: EASTER DAY

April 9

Holy Eucharist 8:30 a.m. and 10:45 a.m.

Today the church completes its three great days of celebrating redemption. Since Maundy Thursday, we have been involved in an extended liturgy which will be brought to its conclusion today. This is the celebration of the Passover of Christ from death into life. Martin Luther captured the true meaning and spirit of this day of celebration when he wrote: “Christ Jesus lay in death’s strong bonds for our offences given; but now at God’s right hand he stands and brings us light from heaven. Wherefore let us joyful be and sing to God right thankfully loud songs of Hallelujah! Hallelujah!”

As we rejoice in our new life in the risen Christ on this day, he comes among us and is made known to us in the breaking of the bread. We are sent forth to tell others of his resurrection. Please feel free to join us in this celebration of God’s victory over death. May you find in this gathering the assurance that God is even now raising you to new life.

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