

Journey of Faith



In Short:



- During Holy Week, we follow the events of Jesus' passion through his resurrection.
- Palm Sunday and the Easter Triduum mark the main events of Holy Week.
- Jesus entrusts us with sharing the good news of his resurrection with others.

During Holy Week, we enter into Christ's passion, death, and resurrection. We not only think about these important events of salvation in a historical way but we also celebrate them in a sacramental way that makes these sacred mysteries present to us.

Palm Sunday

Holy Week begins on Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord, the Sunday before Easter. This liturgy recalls Jesus' dramatic entrance into Jerusalem. He came humbly, riding on a donkey, yet he was honored by the people as the Son of David, the heir to the kingdom. The people laid palm branches before him, greeting Jesus in the spirit of joy and triumph usually associated with victorious kings and armies.

"On the next day, when the great crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, they took palm branches and went out to meet him."

John 12:12–13

After hearing this story from one of the Gospels, we take up our own palm branches and sing, celebrating and honoring Christ our king as the congregation processes into the church. Later, we hear the story of Jesus' passion. These same people who welcomed him in Jerusalem ask for his crucifixion less than a week later. Through these two stories we reflect on the weakness of our human nature.

The Meaning of Holy Week

Imagine you are one of Jesus' disciples. You have witnessed miracles. You have heard the message of God's great kindness and mercy, and you have seen Jesus live that message in his own life. He wasn't the Messiah you expected, but you believe he is who he claims to be. You believe Jesus is the Messiah. You believe he is the Son of God.

Then one night he washes your feet in an act of intimate service and shares a meal with you. Then he is taken from you by an angry crowd after being betrayed by one of his friends. He is beaten. He is ridiculed. He is hanged from a cross with common criminals.

- How would you react to Jesus' crucifixion? How hard or easy would it be to hold on to hope?



The Easter Triduum

Triduum means “a three-day festival.” It’s a time set aside for prayer and worship. The Easter Triduum comprises three days—Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil on Saturday, the heart and core of the whole Church year.

Holy Thursday

The Triduum begins the evening of Holy Thursday, when the **Mass of the Lord’s Supper** celebrates our Lord’s founding or institution of the holy Eucharist. In fact, Holy Thursday is the feast day of the Eucharist and the priesthood. Traditionally in the morning (before the official start of the Triduum), priests and people gather with their bishops for the great chrisam Mass. The priests renew their commitment to priestly service, and the people are asked to pray for them.

The three sacred oils used in the Church are blessed by the bishops during the Chrism Mass:

- **The holy chrism** is used in the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and holy orders as well as during a church’s dedication ceremony.
- **The oil of catechumens** is used during baptism and during the period of the catechumenate.
- **The oil of the infirm** is used in the sacrament of anointing of the sick.

After reading about Jesus’ command to serve others as he has served, the celebrant washes the feet of twelve people, representing the twelve apostles whose feet Jesus washed at the Last Supper. This action reflects Jesus’ teaching that true leadership means service. At the end of the Mass, a procession takes the Blessed Sacrament from the main tabernacle to a smaller altar of repose.

Serve Like Jesus

“I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.”

John 13:15

Read John 13:1–15. Imagine the scene as if you’re there; as if Jesus is washing *your* feet.

- How do you feel about Jesus washing your feet? Uncomfortable? Embarrassed? Amazed?
- How is Jesus asking you to serve others in your life?



Good Friday

The central act of worship on Good Friday is the celebration of the passion of the Lord. This celebration has three key parts:

- Reading the story of the passion from John’s Gospel during the Liturgy of the Word, followed by prayers for the Church and the world.
- The adoration or veneration of the cross. The cross is always a symbol of our salvation and a sign of God’s love for us; during Good Friday we make an additional display of our reverence for the cross to show how grateful we are for Christ’s perfect sacrifice.
- Good Friday is the only day of the Church year where we don’t celebrate a full Mass, but we can still receive holy Communion, in the form of bread only, which has been reserved from Mass on Holy Thursday.

Good Friday is a day of serious reflection on what Christ's death means for us. We are called to both abstain from meat and fast on this Friday as another way to bring us closer to Christ's suffering. Many Catholics also celebrate the Way of the Cross on Good Friday afternoon (see *E5: The Way of the Cross*). This reflection isn't meant to depress us. Rather, we reflect on Christ's death as a way of acknowledging his sacrifice and that Christ's sacrifice was necessary for us to have eternal life with him.

- *How does your belief in Christ's victory over death change how you think about death?*
- *What would it be like to face death without faith?*



Holy Saturday

During the day, the Church is silent and the altars are bare. The tabernacle is empty. This symbolizes how we are waiting in silence at the tomb for our Lord's resurrection. We've prepared for the Easter sacraments through prayer, reflection, and fasting.

After sunset, the church explodes into joy! The celebration of Jesus' resurrection begins. "This is the night when Christ broke the prison bars of death," proclaims the Church in the Proclamation of Easter. And what a night it is! This is a night for the whole parish to celebrate with Catholic churches throughout the world. We come together for the Easter Vigil to experience the central message of our faith—that Jesus is risen and that death and sin are conquered.

The vigil begins at the door of the darkened church, where new fire is kindled. The priest blesses the paschal candle and lights it from the Easter fire. The celebrant or a deacon holds the candle high and carries it into the church, proclaiming, "The Light of

Christ!" We respond, "Thanks be to God!" Other candles are lit from the paschal candle until light fills the whole church, a vibrant symbol of how the light of Christ dispels our darkness.

The Liturgy of the Word leads us to reflect on God's faithful love throughout salvation history. Up to seven Old Testament readings are proclaimed, with psalms interspersed. We listen to the epistle from Romans in which St. Paul writes about our being buried with Jesus Christ "through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life" (6:4). We sing the "Alleluia" for the first time since Lent began. The Gospel and homily follow.

Catechumens are called forth for baptism. We pray a Litany of the Saints. The priest blesses the water. The catechumens are baptized, clothed in white garments, and given lighted candles. The assembly renews their baptismal vows.

Candidates for full communion make a profession of faith. They join the newly baptized for confirmation and later receive first Eucharist.

As with every Mass, we are sent forth to be Christ's body in the world. The Mass ends, but the journey of new Catholics has just begun.

Easter Sunday

Easter morning follows. New life and fresh hope have come in the risen Christ. We celebrate with a renewal of our baptismal promises to reject sin and evil, to love God, and to follow Jesus. But the celebration isn't over!

Easter Sunday marks the beginning of the Easter season—a fifty-day celebration in the Church year that continues until Pentecost. Joyful music, bright spring flowers, and renewed faith in the risen Lord fill the liturgies of this season.

Refer back to the reflection at the beginning of this handout. Imagine you are that follower of Jesus, except this time you are hearing the good news of Jesus' resurrection. With a partner or on your own, create your reaction to this news (it can be a story, poem, picture, skit, or anything else you can think of).



The resurrection story may also occur in our personal lives. Perhaps we have lost a friend and have felt we would die from heartache or loneliness, only to find that our letting go allowed us to enter into a new relationship that was uniquely life-giving and positive. *Write about a time when part of you (or part of your life) had to die so that a new life could begin.*



Journey of Faith for Teens: Enlightenment, E7 (826313)

Imprimi Potest: Stephen T. Rehrauer, CSsR, Provincial, Denver Province, the Redemptorists.

Imprimatur: "In accordance with CIC 827, permission to publish has been granted on June 30, 2016, by the Rev. Msgr. Mark S. Rivituso, Vicar General, Archdiocese of St. Louis. Permission to publish is an indication that nothing contrary to Church teaching is contained in this work. It does not imply any endorsement of the opinions expressed in the publication; nor is any liability assumed by this permission."

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