

Commonly Asked Questions Concerning the Paschal Triduum

1. **When does the Triduum begin and end?**

The Easter Triduum begins with the evening Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday, reaches its high point in the Easter Vigil, and closes with Evening Prayer on Easter Sunday.

2. **May another Mass besides the Mass of the Lord's Supper be celebrated on Holy Thursday?**

No other Mass may be celebrated on Holy Thursday.

3. **When should the Good Friday Celebration of the Lord's Passion take place?**

Normally it should take place in the afternoon, at about 3:00 PM, to enable people to assemble more easily; however, pastoral discretion may indicate a time shortly after midday, or in the late evening, *though never later than 9:00 PM*.

4. **May a deacon officiate at the Celebration of the Lord's Passion?**

Although the Celebration of the Lord's Passion appears to be a service of the Word with the distribution of Holy Communion, the *Roman Missal* does not permit a deacon to officiate at the celebration. Historically, even though the Eucharist is not celebrated on this day, the liturgy of Good Friday bears resemblance to a Mass. At one time it was even called the "Mass of the Presanctified" (referring to the pre-consecrated hosts used at Communion, even when only the priest received Communion). The liturgy of Good Friday, as an integral part of the single celebration of the Triduum, is linked to the Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord's Supper and the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday. It is therefore not permissible to have a deacon officiate or for a parish to celebrate only part of the Triduum.

5. **Does the Church encourage any other liturgical celebrations on Good Friday?**

On this day the Office of Readings and Morning Prayer could appropriately be celebrated with the participation of the people in the churches. Evening Prayer is only prayed by those who do not participate in the Celebration of the Lord's Passion.

6. **Do devotions have a particular importance on Good Friday?**

The *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy* (2002) provides the proper perspective in paragraphs 142-145. The central celebration of this day is the Good Friday Celebration of the Lord's Passion. In no way should manifestations of popular piety substitute for the solemn liturgical action. Nor should aspects of the various acts of piety be mixed with the Good Friday celebration, creating a hybrid.

In recent times, Passion processions, Stations of the Cross, and Passion Plays have become common. Care should be taken, however, to point out to the faithful that such devotions are "representation" which is commemorative and very different from "liturgical actions" which are *anamnesis*, or the mysterious presence of the redemptive event of the Passion. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is not permitted on this day, even if this has been observed in the past as a local parish penitential practice.

7. **How is the cross venerated by members of the congregation on Good Friday?**

After the showing of the Cross, the priest or deacon may carry the Cross to the entrance of

the sanctuary or another suitable place. The first person to adore the Cross is the priest celebrant. *If circumstances suggest, he takes off his chasuble and his shoes.* The clergy, lay ministers and the faithful then approach the Cross.

The personal adoration of the Cross is an important feature in this celebration and every effort should be made to achieve it. The rubrics remind us that “only one Cross” should be used for adoration. If the numbers are so great that all cannot come forward, the priest, after some of the clergy and faithful have adored the Cross, can take it and stand in the center before the altar. In a few words he invites the people to adore the Cross. He then elevates the Cross higher for a brief period of time while the faithful adore it in silence. It should also be kept in mind that when a sufficiently large Cross is used even a large community can reverence it in due time. The foot of the Cross as well as the right and left arm can be approached and venerated. Coordination with ushers and planning the flow of people beforehand can allow for this part of the liturgy to be celebrated with decorum and devotion.

8. When time can the Easter Vigil begin?

The Vigil, by its very nature, must take place at night – after sunset. It is not begun before nightfall and should end before daybreak on Easter Sunday. The Easter Vigil begins and ends in *darkness*. It is a *nocturnal vigil*, retaining its ancient character of vigilance and expectation, as the Christian people await the Resurrection of the Lord during the night. Fire is blessed and the paschal candle is lighted to illumine the night so that all may hear the Easter proclamation and listen to the word of God proclaimed in the Scriptures. For this reason the Solemn Beginning of the Vigil (*Lucernarium*) takes place before the Liturgy of the Word. Since sunset varies at different locations throughout the country, keeping in mind that twilight concludes (*i.e.*, nightfall occurs) somewhat later, **this year the Worship Office has recommended 8:30 p.m. as the appropriate start time.**

9. What considerations should be given for the paschal candle used at the Easter Vigil?

This candle should be made of wax, never be artificial, be replaced each year, be only one in number, and be of sufficiently large size that it may convey the truth that Christ is the light of the world. The paschal candle is the symbol of the *light of Christ, rising in glory*, scattering the darkness of our hearts and minds. Above all, the paschal candle should be a genuine candle, the pre-eminent symbol of the light of Christ. Choice of size, design, and color should be made in relationship to the sanctuary in which it will be placed.

10. At what point are the lights in the church lit during the Easter Vigil?

The deacon or minister carrying the paschal candle arrives at the altar, faces the people, lifts the candles, and starts the dialogue “The Light of Christ” for the third time. He then places the candle in the stand near the ambo or in the center of the sanctuary. All lights in the church are then lit, except for the altar candles.

This is probably the most ignored rubric in Holy Week. Many communities leave the electrical lights off until after the proclamation, or even until the readings have concluded. The prescribed pattern signifies that the light of the paschal candle spreads to every light in the building, not just to the candles in the hands of the faithful. Some communities prefer the effect of experiencing the Easter Proclamation and the readings in darkness, but this creates an additional symbol not foreseen in the rubrics: a further illumination not directly

connected with the light of the candle as the lit paschal candle symbolizes the Light of Christ, which is progressively heralded on its journey to the sanctuary.

11. How are the readings proclaimed at the Easter Vigil?

One of the unique aspects of the Easter Vigil is the recounting of the outstanding deeds of the history of salvation. These deeds are related in seven readings from the Old Testament chosen from the Law and the Prophets and two readings from the New Testament, namely from the Apostle Paul and from the Gospel. Thus, the Lord meets us once again on our journey and, “beginning with Moses and all the prophets” (Lk 24:27) opens up our minds and hearts, preparing us to share in the breaking of the bread and the drinking of the cup.

- a) The faithful are encouraged to meditate on these readings by the singing of a responsorial psalm, followed by a silent pause, and then by the celebrant’s prayer. *Meditation on these readings is so significant for this night that we are strongly urged to use all the readings whenever it can be done. Only in the case of grave pastoral circumstances can the number of readings be reduced. In such cases, at least three readings from the Old Testament should be read, always including Exodus 14.*
- b) The readings are to be proclaimed “as usual.” A lector goes to the ambo and proclaims the reading. A psalmist or cantor leads the people in the psalm. A priest concludes each reading with a prayer. *The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Circular Letter Concerning the Preparation and Celebration of the Easter Feasts (20 February 1988) states, “Great care is to be taken that trivial songs do not take the place of the scriptures.” This includes any musical settings of any of the readings proclaimed at the Easter Vigil (i.e. Exodus 14).*

12. What directions are given for the celebration of Masses on Easter Sunday?

Mass is to be celebrated on Easter Day with great solemnity. A full complement of ministers and the use of liturgical music should be evident in all celebrations. On Easter Sunday in the dioceses of the United States, the rite of the renewal of baptismal promises may take place after the homily, followed by the sprinkling with water blessed at the Vigil, during which the antiphon *Vidi aquam*, or some other song of baptismal character should be sung. If the renewal of baptismal promises does not occur, then the Creed is said. The *Roman Missal* notes that the Apostles' Creed, "the baptismal Symbol of the Roman Church," might be appropriately used during Easter Time. The holy water fonts at the entrance to the church should also be filled with the same water. *On the subsequent Sundays of Easter, it is appropriate that the Rite for the Blessing and Sprinkling of Water take the place of the Penitential Act.*