

HOLY WEEK SERVICES

The services of Holy Week are all centered on the events of the last week of Jesus' life: His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the Last Supper with His apostles, His betrayal in Gethsemane, His suffering and crucifixion, and finally, His resurrection.

The Mass on Palm Sunday begins with the blessing and distribution of the palms: a reenactment of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, when the crowds acclaimed Him as Messiah, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" The Gospel describing Palm Sunday is read. Then the priest blesses the palms, and the congregation comes and kneels at the communion rail to receive the palms. It is customary to kiss the palm as it is given. Then there is the procession, everyone holding palms, with the hymn, "All glory, laud and honor". At the Mass itself, the tone changes: this is a Mass of the Passion. For the Gospel, one of the Passions (Saint Matthew, Saint Mark or Saint Luke) is sung, with the congregation taking the part of the crowd. A short while before, the cry was "Hosanna to the Son of David!" Now it becomes "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

Maundy Thursday (7:30 p.m.) is first of all a celebration of Jesus' institution of the Eucharist "on the night before He suffered." White vestments are worn, the *Gloria* is sung, bells are rung, and are then silent until the *Gloria* of Easter. Communion this night is a special one. After the Last Supper, Jesus went out to the Garden of Gethsemane, where He prayed earnestly and in agony, and while His disciples were supposed to watch but fell asleep. There He was betrayed by Judas and arrested, and the disciples scattered. At the end of the Mass on Maundy Thursday, the Blessed Sacrament is carried in procession to the Altar of Repose at the back of the nave. This symbolizes Jesus' time of prayer in the Garden. Then the ministers return to the Sanctuary and strip the Altar. Everything is removed and the Altar is washed. Jesus has been betrayed. During this scene of confusion, Psalm 22 is sung: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"

The Watch is kept before the Altar of Repose from the end of Mass on Thursday night until the Good Friday service begins at noon. All are invited to spend an hour with Jesus at the Altar of Repose, offering to share His trial - especially where His first disciples failed in their hour's watch. The Altar of Repose is adorned with flowers and plants, symbolizing the garden. If you cannot come for an hour (a sign up sheet is posted so that the watch may be kept unbroken), try to visit the Altar for a few minutes after Mass or in the morning. This is a time and place of great solemnity, and of great intimacy. It is customary, for those who are able, to do a double genuflection (kneel briefly on both knees) when entering and leaving the Presence of the Altar of Repose.

The Good Friday liturgy (noon) concentrates not so much on our sin as it does on the Atonement and Jesus' redeeming death. The altar is un-

adorned and the Tabernacle empty when the Priest enters in silence, and prostrates himself before the altar. Then come the lesson and the Passion according to Saint John. After the ancient form of intercession, known as the Solemn Collects, is the Veneration of the Cross. After the Cross is unveiled, the celebrant begins the veneration. This involves three double genuflections as you approach the cross, the last being at the foot of the cross. It is an ancient devotion to kiss the feet of the Corpus. After the Veneration of the Cross, for the rest of Good Friday, it is customary to reverence the cross with genuflection. There is no celebration of the Mass on Good Friday, but the Sacrament reserved at the Altar of Repose is brought back to the High Altar. After prayers of preparation, the Priest and people receive Communion from the reserved Sacrament in one kind. Aside from a few consecrated wafers reserved "in a remote place" for communion of the dying, all remaining consecrated bread is consumed. There is no Blessing and no Peace on Good Friday. (Traditionally, the only sacraments celebrated on Good Friday are Penance and Holy Unction.)

For the remainder of the three hours (noon to 3), the hours Jesus hung upon the Cross, we remain in Church, with prayers, hymns, silence, and preaching on the Seven Last Words from the Cross. It is the time of our Lord's Passion, when we naturally wish to be in Church, in gratitude as well as devotion.

On Holy Saturday, the brief liturgy in the morning is Ante-Communion (the first part of Mass up to the Offertory), in commemoration of the time Jesus lay in the tomb. There is no celebration of the Mass between the Mass on Maundy Thursday, and the first Mass of Easter at the Vigil on Holy Saturday night. (Of course, there is much to be done on Holy Saturday to adorn the Church for Easter.)

The First Mass of Easter takes place at the Vigil, which begins at 8:30 on Saturday night. The Vigil begins with the church in darkness. There is not even the light of the Tabernacle lamp, which is unlit because the Sacrament is not present. At the back of the nave, the ministers kindle the New Fire in a small brazier. The fire is blessed, and then by its light, they prepare the Paschal Candle, with five nails (for the five wounds of Christ) and the year inscribed on it. This candle is lit from the fire, and the Deacon announces "The Light of Christ!", to which the people respond (with a genuflection), "Thanks be to God!" Then everyone's hand candles are lit from the Paschal Candle. The candle itself is then blessed with the singing of the *Exsultet*. Then the Vigil continues with a series of Old Testament lessons, Canticles and Collects, beginning with the story of creation and ending with the great Prophets. After the last Old Testament lesson, the *Gloria in excelsis Deo* is intoned, bells rung (these have been silent since the *Gloria* on Maundy Thursday), and the altar candles lit. The congregation is encouraged to bring hand bells to ring at this time. After the Epistle the Alleluia returns (absent since Septuagesima), intoned by the Priest and repeated by the people. After the sermon comes the Litany of the Saints and Blessing of the Font. It is blessed each year, for all those who will be receiving their new life from Christ in baptism, whether at they are baptized at the Vigil or during the year. If there are adult

catechumens, they are baptized, and the faithful are invited to renew their baptismal vows. The First Mass of Easter follows, beginning with the Offertory. The Mass is, needless to say, one of great joy. The Mass on Easter Day is also festive celebrating the triumph of Jesus' resurrection. The faithful are permitted to receive Communion at both Easter Masses.