

Drawing THE BEST out of HOLY WEEK

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Holy Week is an important week for us Catholics throughout the world. Holy Week, the Week of weeks, begins on Palm Sunday and ends with Holy Saturday. Easter Sunday is not part of Holy Week, but rather the beginning of a new liturgical season - the Easter Season. Holy Week is a time when all Catholics gather to remember and participate in the Passion of Jesus Christ. The Passion was the final period of Christ's life in Jerusalem.

The Church celebrates four important and significant events during Holy Week as follows:

PALM SUNDAY: On this day, we recall Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem riding a donkey. We begin Holy Week in our churches with the blessing ceremony of the palms which includes the reading of a Gospel account of how Jesus rode into Jerusalem humbly on a donkey, and how people placed palms and other branches on the ground in front of Him. This was a customary practice reserved for triumphant leaders and/or people of great respect. The blessing of the palms is followed by a procession or solemn entrance into the church, with the people holding the blessed palms in their hands. The Mass follows as usual.

MAUNDY THURSDAY: It is a day of commemoration of the Last Supper of Jesus with His twelve apostles, the institution of the priesthood and the commandment of brotherly love that Jesus demonstrated with the washing of the feet of His apostles. The altar bells are rung during the Gloria of the Mass, and are then silent until the Gloria at the Easter Vigil. A sufficient number of hosts are consecrated for use at the Good Friday Liturgical Service; at the conclusion of the Mass, the Blessed Sacrament is carried in procession to the Altar of Repose. Later, the altar of the church is stripped bare, and to the extent possible, crosses are covered with violet cloth.

GOOD FRIDAY: On this day, there is no Mass, but a Liturgical Service of the Passion of Our Lord through which Catholics commemorate the trial, punishment, and the crucifixion of Our Lord Jesus Christ. The Liturgy consists of three parts – the Liturgy of the Word, the Veneration of the Cross and Holy Communion.

The first part of the Service is the Liturgy of the Word which begins with the main celebrant and concelebrants entering in complete silence. They then silently make a full prostration. This signifies the grief and sorrow of the Church, followed by a Prayer and a reading from Isaiah, the Letter to the Hebrews and the Passion account from the Gospel of St John. The Great Intercessions follow after a brief reflection (homily) when prayers are offered for the Church, the Pope, clergy, laity, those preparing for baptism, those in public office, etc.

The second part of the Service is the Veneration of the Cross when a crucifix is solemnly unveiled before the congregation. People come forward in an orderly manner for veneration. During this part, the "Reproaches" are often sung.

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The third and final part is the Service of Communion; hosts consecrated at the Mass of the previous day are distributed to the people.

Pious exercises which are carried out on Good Friday include Stations of the Cross, a reflection on the Seven Last Words of Jesus (commonly referred to as ‘The Three Hours Agony’) and the descent of the Body of Jesus from the Cross at the end of the Liturgical Service.

The Novena to the Divine Mercy begins on Good Friday and lasts till the Saturday before the Feast of Divine Mercy, celebrated on the Sunday after Easter Sunday.

HOLY SATURDAY: On Holy Saturday, there is no Mass, and hence no distribution of Holy Communion. It is the last day of Holy Week when Catholics contemplate Jesus, lying dead in the tomb. In silent expectation, the Christian community relives the dismay of the apostles after the death of Jesus. Even if everything seems to be silent, Christ is at work. In fact, according to ancient tradition, on this day, Jesus descended into hell to save man, and take him along with HIM to heaven, where HE precedes us and awaits us with open arms. Holy Saturday has also been celebrated as the Day of Mary in whom we find both the pain of bereavement of her only beloved Son and the hope of His resurrection. For this reason, Mary has been given titles such as Our Lady of Sorrows, Our Lady of Dolours or Mother of Sorrows which have become key subjects of Marian art in the Catholic Church.

Questions for reflection:

1. How can I better celebrate Holy Week this year? (e.g. read the Gospel passages in preparation, spiritual preparation – confession, etc.)
2. What can we do as a family and SCC to make Holy Week truly sacred and special this year?