

## EIGHTEEN QUESTIONS ON THE PASCHAL TRIDUUM- USCCB

The following eighteen questions address the most commonly received questions concerning the Sacred Paschal Triduum, and may be freely reproduced by diocesan Offices for Worship, parish Liturgy Committees, and others seeking to promote the effective celebration of these most sacred days.

- 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?**  
Ordinarily, no other Mass may be celebrated on Holy Thursday. However, by way of exception, the local Ordinary may permit another Mass in churches and oratories to be celebrated in the evening, and, in the case of genuine necessity, even in the morning. Such Masses are provided for those who in no way are able to participate in the evening Mass.
- 3. How are the Holy Oils, consecrated and blessed at the Chrism Mass, to be received in the parish?**  
A reception of the oils may take place before the Mass of the Lord's Supper. The oils, in suitable vessels, can be carried in procession by members of the assembly. A text for this can be found [here](#).
- 4. Is the *Mandatum*, the washing of feet at the Mass of the Lord's Supper, required?**  
No. The *Roman Missal* only indicates, "After the Homily, where a pastoral reason suggests it [*ubi ratio pastoralis id suadeat*], the Washing of Feet follows."
- 5. 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. Depending on the size or nature of a parish or other community, the local Ordinary may permit the service to be repeated.
- 6. 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 called the "Mass of the Presanctified" (referring to the pre-consecrated hosts used at Communion, even when only the priest received Communion). This is also reflected in the prescribed vesture for the priest: stole and chasuble. The liturgy of Good Friday, as an integral part of the Triduum, is linked to the Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord's Supper and the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday. While there may be cases where a parish with multiple churches or chapels (e.g., mission churches or a cluster of parishes under one pastor) might rotate the liturgies among the various locations, it would not be appropriate for a community to celebrate only part of the Triduum.
- 7. May any of the readings at the Celebration of the Lord's Passion be omitted?**  
The *Lectionary for Mass* does not indicate that any readings may be omitted at the Celebration of the Lord's Passion. All three readings (Isaiah, Hebrews, and the Passion according to John) are required. It should be noted, however, for Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion, the *Lectionary* indicates that while all three readings provided *should* be used, there may be circumstances in which one or more of the readings at Mass could be omitted: "Given, however, the importance of the account of the Lord's Passion, the priest, having in mind the character of each individual congregation, is authorized to choose only one of the two readings prescribed before the Gospel, or if necessary, he may read only the account of the Passion, even in the shorter form. This permission applies, however, only to Masses celebrated with a congregation." Thus, the account of the Passion is never omitted.
- 8. 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. Note that Evening Prayer is only prayed by those who do not participate in the Celebration of the Lord's Passion.
- 9. 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. Clearly the central celebration of this day is the Good Friday Celebration of the Lord's Passion. In no way should manifestations of popular piety, either by the time or manner in which they are convoked, substitute for this 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, celebrations of the Stations of the Cross, and Passion Plays have become more common. In such representations, actors and spectators can be involved in a moment of faith and genuine piety. Care should be taken, however, to point out to the faithful that a Passion Play is a representation which is commemorative and they are very different from "liturgical actions" which are *anamnesis*, or the mysterious presence of the redemptive event of the Passion.
- 10. How does the Adoration of the Holy Cross on Good Friday begin?**  
The Adoration of the Holy Cross begins with one of two forms of the Showing of the Holy Cross. The First Form begins as the deacon or another suitable minister goes to the sacristy and obtains the veiled Cross. Accompanied by two ministers with lighted candles, the veiled Cross is brought to the center of the sanctuary in procession. The priest accepts the Cross and then, standing in front of the altar and facing the people, uncovers the upper part of the Cross, the right arm, and then the entire Cross. Each time he unveils a part of the Cross, he sings the acclamation, *Behold the wood of the Cross*. In the Second Form of the Showing of the Holy Cross, the priest or deacon goes to the church door, where he takes up the uncovered Cross. Accompanied by two ministers with lighted candles, he processes to the sanctuary, stopping at the door of the church, in the middle of the church, and before entering the sanctuary, to sing the acclamation, *Behold the wood of the Cross*.

**11. 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.

**12. When should the Easter Vigil take place?**

The Vigil, by its very nature, must take place at night. It is not begun before nightfall and should end before daybreak on Easter Sunday. The celebration of the Easter Vigil takes the place of the Office of Readings of 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, local weather stations can be consulted as to the time of sunset in the area, keeping in mind that twilight concludes (*i.e.*, nightfall occurs) somewhat later.

**13. 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.

**14. In the case of mission churches and cluster parishes, can multiple paschal candles be used for the Service of Light?**

The *Roman Missal*, not envisioning the pastoral situation of mission churches or cluster parishes, specifies that only one paschal candle is used. To accommodate the particular circumstances, the Secretariat of Divine Worship might suggest that the candles from the mission churches or other parish churches could be present at the Easter Vigil, having been prepared in advance, and blessed alongside the main candle (perhaps having deacons or other representatives holding them). In keeping with the rubrics, for the lighting and procession only one candle should be lit (the principal one, or the one which will remain in that particular church). As the other candles in the congregation are lit, the other paschal candles could be lit and held (but not high, in order to maintain the prominence of the one principal candle) by someone at their place in the assembly. Once all the candles are extinguished after the singing of the *Exsultet*, the other paschal candles are put aside. On Easter Sunday morning, those candles could be taken to each of the missions and carried, lit, in the entrance procession at the first Mass at each church and put in place in the sanctuary.

**15. How many readings should be 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. 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.

**16. How is the First Communion of the neophytes to be emphasized during the Easter Vigil?**

The celebrant, before he says, *Behold the Lamb of God*, may make a brief remark to the neophytes about their first Communion and about the importance of so great a mystery, which is the climax of initiation and the center of the Christian life. This is a night when all should be able to receive Holy Communion under both forms.

**17. 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 fountains 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.

**18. Where is the paschal candle placed during Easter Time?**

The paschal candle has its proper place either by the ambo or by the altar and should be lit at least in all the more solemn liturgical celebrations of the season until Pentecost Sunday, whether at Mass, or at Morning and Evening Prayer. After Easter Time the candle should be kept with honor in the baptistery, so that in the celebration of Baptism the candles of the baptized may be lit from it. In the celebration of funerals the paschal candle should be placed near the coffin to indicate Christ's undying presence, his victory over sin and death, and the promise of sharing in Christ's victory by virtue of being part of the Body of Christ (see *Order of Christian Funerals*, no. 35). The paschal candle should not otherwise be lit nor placed in the sanctuary outside Easter Time.

# Our Guide To Holy Week

from Our Sunday Visitor

## Celebrations of Our Lord's passion and his glorious resurrection date to earliest days of Christianity

*In the first century, the early Christians celebrated every Sunday in commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus. By the second century, they established a particular day for the celebration of the resurrection, which was connected to the Jewish Passover.*

*Their observance began at sundown on Saturday evening. They called it the Night of the Great Vigil, a time of remembrance and expectation that lasted throughout the night so they could sing "alleluia" at dawn on Easter morning. It was during the Night of the Great Vigil that new Christians were received into the Church.*

*By the fourth century, it became customary for people to make pilgrimages to Jerusalem to celebrate what was called the "Great Week," which included Holy Thursday, Good Friday, the Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday. The diary of a woman named Egeria in 381 contains the first accounts of the special rites, prayers and devotions that took place in Jerusalem during the Great Week.*

*Over time, the practice of observing Holy Week spread throughout the Christian world, with prayers, historical re-enactments and special liturgies. During the Middle Ages, the celebration of the Easter Vigil gradually fell out of practice. The important days of the week were Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday.*

*In 1955, the Vatican re-established the Easter Vigil as an important part of Holy Week observances.*

*During the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), the bishops called for the restoration of the early Christian rituals for receiving new Christians into the Church at the Easter Vigil. In 1988, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults was issued.*

*Today, Easter Vigil with the Easter fire, the lighting of the paschal candle, the reading of salvation history, the celebration of the sacraments of initiation for catechumens and renewal of baptismal promises for the faithful is once again an integral part of Holy Week celebrations.*

[Download this Holy Week guide](#)



How much do you remember about the people and events of Holy Week? Here's a little quiz to test your knowledge. The answers are at the bottom of this page.

- 1) Where did the Agony in the Garden take place?
- 2) Who betrayed Jesus?
- 3) Who denied Jesus three times?
- 4) Who ordered Jesus to be scourged?
- 5) What criminal was released instead of Jesus?
- 6) How many Stations of the Cross are there?
- 7) How many times does Jesus fall on the way to Calvary?
- 8) Who helped Jesus carry his cross?
- 9) Who wiped the face of Jesus?
- 10) What did the sign on the cross say?
- 11) Who made arrangements for the burial of Jesus?
- 12) Who was the first to discover that Jesus had risen?

[Answers here](#)

1. **THINK PRAYER.** If you have to work or go to school during Holy Week, think about how you can incorporate prayer breaks into each day.
2. **MAKE AN ADDITIONAL SACRIFICE** by fasting and abstaining from meat on Holy Thursday and Holy Saturday in addition to Good Friday.
3. **DON'T WATCH TELEVISION** from sundown on Holy Thursday until Easter morning.
4. **GO** to confession.
5. **SET ASIDE** 10 minutes every day to read Passion accounts in the Gospels.
6. Make it a point to **FORGIVE** someone on Good Friday.
7. **PRAY** the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary.
8. **OFFER UP** any pain or difficulties you experience during Holy Week and unite your sufferings with the pain of Christ.
9. **PRAY** the Stations of the Cross.
10. **ATTEND** all of the Triduum liturgies.
11. **INVITE** family members, friends and neighbors — especially people who have strayed from the church — to come to church with you.
12. **VOLUNTEER** to help decorate your parish on Holy Saturday for Easter.



**Palm crosses:** From medieval times, people have believed that blessed palms formed into the shape of a cross would protect them from danger. The easiest way to make a cross from blessed palms is to cut two pieces of the palm, arrange in the shape of a cross, put a thumbtack in the middle, and attach the cross to a doorway or a bulletin board. Check Google for directions on [how to braid or weave palms into more decorative crosses](#).



**Housecleaning:** In many cultures the Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of Holy Week are designated as days for vigorous housecleaning in preparation for Easter. This custom probably evolved from the Jewish custom of ritual cleaning before Passover.

**Visiting churches:** The custom of visiting several churches to say a prayer on Holy Thursday was a tradition that evolved from the practice of making pilgrimages to holy places.

**New clothes:** From the time of the early Christians, the newly baptized wore white garments made from new linen. In medieval times, it became a tradition for people to wear new clothes on Easter Sunday, symbolizing the "new life" that comes with the Resurrection. In some places it was believed that bad luck would come to those who could afford new Easter clothes but refused to buy them.



**Easter lilies:** The tradition of buying Easter lilies during Holy Week for use as decorations in homes and churches came into practice in the 1800s. The white flower is a symbol of purity and new life that heralds the resurrection of Jesus.



**Coloring eggs:** Decorating eggs was a pagan symbol of rebirth at springtime for the Romans, Greeks, Egyptians, Persians and even the Chinese. Christians adopted the colored egg as a symbol of new life which comes with the Resurrection.



**Sweet breads:** In many cultures, Holy Week was traditionally a time for baking sweet breads, cakes and pastries that would be served on Easter Sunday.



**Holy Water blessings:** Some families bring holy water containers to Mass on Easter so they can bring home some Easter water, which is blessed during the Easter Vigil, to bless their homes.



The word "[Triduum](#)" comes from the Latin word meaning "three days," and encompasses the three most sacred days in the Church year. It begins at sundown on Holy Thursday, reaches a high point at the Easter Vigil, and concludes with evening prayer at sundown on Easter Sunday. The liturgical celebrations during the Triduum on Holy Thursday, Good Friday, the Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday are rich with symbolism and flow from one to another in a seamless way. While it may appear as if these liturgies are separate and distinct, they are actually intended to be one continuous celebration that commemorates the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. For this reason, Catholics are encouraged to observe the entire Triduum by attending all of the liturgies.

## The Chrism Mass

---



During Holy Week bishops bless sacred oils in the diocesan cathedral at a special liturgy known as the [Chrism](#) Mass. The oil of chrism is used during baptisms, confirmation, ordination and the consecration of altars. The oil of catechumens is used at the Easter Vigil. The oil of the sick is used to anoint people during the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. The oils are then distributed to the parishes for sacramental celebrations throughout the year. As part of the liturgical reforms of Vatican II, the renewal of priestly promises was incorporated into the Chrism Mass. The Chrism Mass is an ancient celebration that traditionally takes place on Holy Thursday morning. But in recent years, many dioceses celebrate the Chrism Mass on an evening earlier in Holy Week so that more people can attend.

## Quiz answers

---

- 1) Gethsemane or the Mount of Olives
- 2) Judas
- 3) Peter
- 4) Pontius Pilate
- 5) Barabbas
- 6) 14
- 7) three
- 8) Simon of Cyrene
- 9) Veronica
- 10) King of the Jews
- 11) Joseph of Arimathea
- 12) Mary Magdalene