



LENTEN REFLECTIONS



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SEASON OF LENT

"May our loving God lead us all closer to our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, during this holy Season of Lent."

*By the solemn forty days of Lent, the Church unites herself each year to the mystery of Jesus who spent forty days in wilderness praying and fasting to prepare for His ministry, which culminated in His death and resurrection. Let us now understand the **principal events** of the Season of Lent and what is expected of us on each of these days..*



Ash Wednesday

VESTMENT COLOR : PURPLE

Ash Wednesday is the start of the Season of Lent and opens up this season of penitence. It is an obligatory day of fasting and abstinence.

On this day all the faithful approach the altar and there the priest, dipping his thumb into ashes previously blessed, marks the forehead of each with the sign of the cross, saying the words: "Dust thou art and unto dust thou shalt return; repent, and believe in the Gospel." At the beginning of Lent, these words on Ash Wednesday are a plan of life for us. They are the words with which Christ began His preaching.

The **ashes** which are obtained by burning the palms of Palm Sunday of the previous year remind us of our mortality and are a sign of our willingness to do penance and reform our lives. It is a time when we are reminded to return to the Lord, our God, if we have been negligent in our spiritual lives. It is a time when we accept His grace with thankfulness. It is a realization that our salvation depends on what we do today, not putting it off.

***Holy Week** is the last week of Lent and precedes Easter Sunday. It is a time when the Church calls us to reflect on the suffering (Passion), humiliation and death of Jesus through various observances and services of worship. Only when we walk through the shadow and darkness of Holy Week, we realize the magnitude of sin and its consequences which was incarnated in the dying of Jesus on the Cross - only in contemplating the end, can we truly understand the light and hope of Easter - the Resurrection.*

Palm (Passion) Sunday

VESTMENT COLOR : RED

Palm or Passion Sunday observes the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. It marks the beginning of Holy Week, which is the most solemn period of the year.

The people who were in Jerusalem for the Passover waved palm branches and proclaimed Him as King. The irony of this is shown five days later when the same people cry out for His execution, thus showing how changeable human nature is. Palm Sunday is presented as a time to reflect on the suffering and death of Jesus in a service of worship. We must remember that every Sunday is always a celebration of the Resurrection and so the Church tells us that even Passion Sunday should not be seen as a mournful event because we know that after this is the joyful event of the Resurrection.

The principal ceremonies of the day are the **Blessing of the Palms**, the **Procession**, the **Holy Mass**, and during the Mass the **Reading of the Passion**.

READINGS FOR THE DAY:

First Reading - **Isaiah 50:4-7 (38)**
Responsorial Psalm - **Psalm 22:8-9,17-24**
Second Reading - **Philippians 2:6-11**
Gospel - **Matthew 26:14-27:66**

PALMS AND THE PROCESSION: The procession at Mass with the palms is a public display of homage and loyalty to Christ our King and Redeemer.

SIGNIFANCE OF THE PALMS: Palm branches are traditionally used by all nations as an emblem of joy and victory over enemies; In Christianity, they symbolize victory over the evil and sins of mankind and hence are especially associated with the memory of martyrs. In the five prayers which are said during the benediction, the bishop or priest asks God to bless the branches of palm or olive, that they may be a protection to all places into which they may be brought, that the right hand of God may expell all adversity, bless and protect all who dwell in them, who have been redeemed by our Lord Jesus Christ. The prayers make reference to the dove bringing back the olive branch to Noah's ark and to the multitude greeting Our Lord.



It is said that the branches of palms signify victory over the prince of death and the olive the advent of spiritual unction through Christ. The officiating clergyman sprinkles the palms with holy water, incenses them, and, after another prayer, distributes them. The palms blessed on Palm Sunday are used in the procession of the day, and then taken home by the faithful to be used as a sacramental. Sacramentals should be treated with respect and never be thrown away. Palms may only be burned or buried. It is customary to gather the palms from Mass and make little palm crosses, one for each member of the family and one for each room in the house.



The Easter or Sacred Triduum refers to the last three days of Holy Week. It is now that the three-part drama of Christ's Redemption: Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday, unfolds.

Maundy Thursday

VESTMENT COLOR : WHITE

'Maundy' comes from the Latin word *mandatum* (commandment). The sacred events of Holy Thursday represent the Lord's institution of the Sacraments of the Blessed Eucharist and Holy Orders.

After Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem, the Pharisees and Sadducees felt threatened by the new future that Jesus proclaimed and the crowds who welcomed Him too were drawing back from the Man who spoke of commitment and servanthood. The Thursday of Holy Week is remembered as the time when Jesus ate His final meal with the men who followed Him for so long. It reminds us of the humility and servanthood that Jesus preached by washing the feet of His disciples. It recalls the institution of the Eucharist, Jesus' praying in the Garden of Gethsemane and the betrayal of Judas. It is a day of remembering because as we share the Eucharist where Jesus calls us to remember the new act of deliverance that will take place on these last days of Holy Week.

There are only two Masses on Holy Thursday, the Chrism Mass and the evening Mass of the Lord's Supper.

CHRISM MASS: The Chrism Mass or Mass of the Holy Oils, is usually said in the morning at the Cathedral of the diocese. The Holy Oils that will be used during the following year in the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Orders and the Sacrament of the Sick are blessed by the Bishop at this Mass. This Mass also celebrates the institution of the priesthood.

Chrism which is a mixture of oil of **olives** and **balsam** - has been introduced into the functions of the church liturgy, owing to its symbolical significance. Olive-oil, being rich and abiding, is fitted to represent the outpouring of sacramental grace, while balsam, which gives forth a fragrant odour, typifies the innate sweetness of Christian virtue. Thus, anointing with chrism aptly signifies that fullness of grace and spiritual strength by which we are enabled to resist the contagion of sin and produce the sweet flowers of virtue.

The **blessing of each oil** by the Bishop also explains the **significance** of the particular oil.

The Oil of the Sick :

"May the sick who are anointed with this oil experience the compassion of Christ and His saving love in body, mind, and soul."

The Oil of the Catechumens :

"Through anointing with this oil may our catechumens who are preparing to receive the saving waters of baptism be strengthened by Christ to resist the power of Satan and reject evil in all its forms."

The Holy Chrism :

"Through anointing with this perfumed chrism may children and adults who are baptised and confirmed, and presbyters who are ordained, experience the gracious gift of the Holy Spirit."



WASHING OF THE FEET: A ceremonial re-enactment of the 'Washing of the Feet' is part of the Holy Thursday liturgy. This ritual symbolically fulfills the command of Jesus at the Last Supper: "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you." (John 13:14-15). As disciples of the Lord then, we are all invited to imitate His example in humble service to one another.

PROCESSION TO THE ALTAR OF REPOSE: After the Mass of the Lord's Supper, the Holy Eucharist is carried by the priest to the Altar of Repose where we should remain in quiet prayer and adoration, keeping Christ company.

Good Friday

VESTMENT COLOR : RED (symbolizing Martyrs Day) or BLACK

Good Friday commemorates the arrest, trial, suffering, crucifixion, death and burial of Jesus. It is an obligatory day of fasting and abstinence.



Since on this day we observe Jesus' death, and since the Eucharist is a celebration, traditionally there is no Eucharistic celebration on this day. The omission of the Mass proper marks in the mind of the Church the deep sorrow with which she keeps the anniversary of the Sacrifice of Calvary. Good Friday is a feast of grief. There is, perhaps, no office in the whole liturgy so dramatic as the ceremonial of Good Friday.

All pictures, statues and crosses are covered, the chancel and altar coverings are replaced with black and altar candles are extinguished. Good Friday is not a day of celebration but of mourning, both for the death of Jesus and for the sins of the world that His death represents.

GOOD FRIDAY SERVICE: The service is divided into three parts: Liturgy of the Word and Intercessions, Veneration of the Cross and Holy Communion. The Church in its services encourages the faithful to meditate on the series of Scripture readings with time for prayer. The Scripture readings and meditation are to recall the darkness that took place not only during Jesus' death, but also of the hopelessness of the world without God. **Red vestments** signify the Blood of Jesus, the **bare altar**, the slow and solemn reading of the sufferings of Christ (**the Passion according to St. John**), prayer intentions (**intercessions**) for all those for whom He died, and finally the **unveiling and reverencing of the Crucifix**

VENERATION OF THE CROSS: A veiled Cross is solemnly processed to the altar during the church service. After the solemn unveiling, the clergy and the congregation venerate and kiss the wooden cross "on which hung the Savior of the world".

In our Vicariate, it is the practice not to distribute Holy Communion to all present. Rather, the congregation is invited by the main celebrant, to make a spiritual communion when the members of the clergy receive the Sacred Host.



Although Good Friday is a solemn time, it is not without its joy because even though it is important to place it against the darkness of the Crucifixion, we should always see it with the hope of Resurrection Sunday.

Holy Saturday

Holy Saturday is the seventh day in the week, it is the day Jesus rested in the tomb.

Church traditions suspend services during the day, only to be resumed at the Easter Vigil. Holy Saturday is the time to remember family and the faithful who have died as we await the Resurrection, or to honour the martyrs who have given their lives to the cause of Christ in the world. Holy Saturday is a time for reflection and waiting, a time of weeping that lasts for the night while awaiting the joy that comes at Easter.

THE EASTER VIGIL

The resurrection of Christ is the foundation of our faith and hope, and through baptism and confirmation, we are inserted into the paschal mystery of Christ, dying, buried, and raised with him; and with him, we shall also reign. The night before Easter Sunday is one of vigil for the Lord' (**Exodus 12 :42**). The Vigil celebrated during it commemorates that holy night when the Lord rose from the dead. It is regarded as the '**mother of all holy vigils**' (St. Augustine); for in that night, the Church keeps vigil, waiting for the **resurrection of the Lord**, and celebrates the sacraments of **Christian initiation**.



The **first part of the Vigil** consists of symbolic acts.

THE PASCHAL CANDLE	
	<p>The Paschal Candle is a representation of the Light of Christ come into the world. This Candle is traditionally the first to be lit from the newly blessed fire ... It is used at Baptisms to light the Candles given to those who are baptised, to represent the Light of Christ. The Candle has inscribed on it - the Alpha and the Omega symbols, and the year, as well as five grains of incense which signify the wounds of Christ.</p>

The new fire is blessed at the entrance of the Church and the Paschal candle is lit. As the Paschal Candle is lit a special chant called the the **Exsultet (Easter proclamation)** is sung. This magnificent hymn, which is remarkable for its lyric beauty and profound symbolism, announces the dignity and meaning of the mystery of Easter.

The faithful enter into the church in a procession led by the **light of the Paschal candle**. (Just as the children of Israel were guided at night by a pillar of fire, so similarly Christians follow the risen Christ.) The deacon carries the lighted candle and in a loud voice exclaims three times before reaching the altar, "**CHRIST, OUR LIGHT**". On reaching the altar, the candle and the Holy Book are incensed and then blessed. The

deacon makes the **Easter proclamation** to which the choir responds in joyful note! ... (Throughout the fifty days of Easter, the Paschal Candle traditionally stands near the altar as a symbol of the resurrection. It is lighted for each liturgy during the great fifty days of Easter. Easter is not over until Pentecost, the fiftieth day!)

The readings from Sacred Scripture constitute the **second part of the Vigil**.

The two readings taken from **Genesis 1:1-2:2** (The creation story) and from **Exodus 14:15-15:1** are accounts of the outstanding deeds in the history of salvation.

The **third part of the Vigil** is the renewal of baptismal promises made by all, introduced by some words on the part of the celebrating priest, after which, the priest sprinkles the people with water - thus recalling to them the **baptism** they have received.

THE BAPTISMAL PROMISES ...

On Easter Day, we are able to renew once again our own baptismal promises ... introduced by some words on the part of the celebrating priest, after which, the priest sprinkles the people with water - thus recalling to them the baptism they have received.

V. Do you reject Satan?

R. I do.

V. And all his works?

R. I do.

V. And all his empty promises?

R. I do.

V. Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth?

R. I do.

V. Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary was crucified, died, and was buried, rose from the dead, and is now seated at the right hand of the Father?

R. I do.

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting?

R. I do.

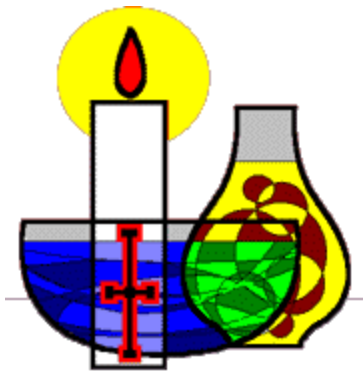
V. God, the all-powerful Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has given us a new birth by water and the Holy Spirit, and forgiven all our sins. May he also keep us faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ for ever and ever.

R. Amen.

PRAYER

God of mercy, You wash away our sins in water, You give us a new birth in the Spirit, and redeem us in the blood of Christ. As we celebrate Christ's resurrection, increase our awareness of these blessings, and renew Your gift of life within us. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

The celebration of the Eucharist that forms the fourth part of the Vigil and marks its high point, is in the fullest sense the Easter Sacrament, that is to say, the Commemoration of the Sacrifice of the Cross and the



Presence of the Risen Christ and the Completion of Christian Initiation.

Picture of the Cross - Courtesy: www.freefoto.com
Photographs of the Vicariate: Rewon Gomes

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