



What is the Easter Triduum?

The word Triduum (*pronounced Trid-oo-oom*), is from a Latin phrase for “Three Days.” During these days the Church takes time to reflect and celebrate the Mystery that is the core of our Faith—Christ’s suffering, death and resurrection. The three days actually cover four calendar days: Day One starts at the Evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper and ends on Good Friday; Day Two covers Good Friday evening through Holy Saturday; Day Three begins with the Easter Vigil and concludes in the evening of Easter Sunday. This is much like days were ordered in the Hebrew tradition (from sundown to sundown rather than midnight to midnight).

Preparing for the Easter Triduum

These are the holiest of days in the Church’s year. Ideally, they will be the holiest days in our household. Find out the dates & times when your parish is celebrating the liturgies of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, the Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday. Mark these dates and times in your calendar and—instead of attending if it fits into your schedule—try to plan other activities around these important and beautiful liturgies. Some parishes offer other smaller liturgical celebrations during the Triduum, for example Morning Prayer, Tenebrae, or the Blessing of Food. You may find these beneficial, too.

If you will be traveling, visit the website of a local parish (or visit MassTimes.org) before you go and plan to attend at least some of the liturgies there.

Put a crucifix or cross in a place that you will see often (for example, as a centerpiece for the kitchen table). Perhaps leave your Bible open to the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ last earthly days (Matthew 26 and following, Mark 14 and following, Luke 22 and following, John 13 and following). Spend a little extra time on these Holy Days praying. Pray for your family and your parish. Pray for those who will receive the Easter Sacraments (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) at your parish. You can stop everything to pray, or you can offer short prayers while you are washing dishes, folding laundry, walking from the car to work, etc. You can use your own words or say something like this, “Jesus, remember me, when you come into your Kingdom,” “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit,” or “I adore you, O Christ, and bless you, because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.”

Holy Thursday

Lent ends with no formality sometime during the day on Holy Thursday. On Holy Thursday each parish can celebrate only one Mass, called the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper. It's held in the evening just as Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with his disciples in the evening in the upper room. Plan to attend this Mass with your family if at all possible. This is one of the richest and most beautiful liturgies of the Church. We commemorate the Last Supper when Jesus instituted both the Sacrament of the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Holy Orders. The readings and prayers focus on these two great Sacraments. The pastor may wash the feet of a few people recalling what Jesus did.

Since no Masses can be celebrated on Good Friday, many extra hosts are consecrated at this Mass and left on the altar after Holy Communion. The vessels with Holy Communion—the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ—are solemnly processed through the Church, accompanied by incense and candles. It is not taken to the usual tabernacle but to another place which we refer to as the Altar of Repose. Here, it is reserved in a tabernacle so that it may be taken to the sick at any time and may be consumed on Good Friday. It also gives people a chance to spend a moment in prayer before the Lord, fully present in the Sacrament.

If you cannot participate in the Evening Mass, as a family read the Gospel for the evening and conclude by washing each other's feet (this can even be done in a hotel room if you're traveling). The readings of the day are available on the United States Bishops' website ([click here](#)).

Although the Lenten fast has ended, the Church encourages everyone to celebrate the "Paschal Fast," which continues until the Easter Vigil. Eat and drink sparingly, thinking of what the Lord has done for us as well as all of those who do not have access to nutritious food. Refrain from (or limit) screen time (TV, iPad, etc.) after the evening Mass. Spend time in prayer or reading Scripture, take time to talk with your family, visit someone who may be lonely, or call a relative. Think about what Holy Communion means to you and how you acknowledge Christ's presence in the Eucharist.



The Last Supper. Fresco by Pietro Lorenzetti (c. 1280-1348).
Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi (Italy). Public domain.



Good Friday

On Good Friday we come face to face with the cost of sin. Jesus, who had no sin, had to carry the burden of all of our sins and obediently suffer death. We don't pretend that we don't know the joyful end of the story, but today we contemplate the cost of that joy.

The Celebration of the Lord's Passion begins with the priest and ministers entering and the priest prostrating himself on the floor, in a gesture of total adoration for what the Lord has done. The liturgy is celebrated in three parts. The first is the Liturgy of the Word where we hear Isaiah's prophesy of the suffering servant and then take up Jesus' heart wrenching words, "Father, into your hands, I commend my spirit," joining our prayer to him. Each year we hear the Passion according to St. John which describes the events in such vivid language.



The second part of the liturgy is the Veneration of the Cross. This was first practiced by the early Christians in Jerusalem. The liturgy actually was held on Golgotha, the place where Jesus was crucified. Centuries later, this practice was adapted in Rome and other cities. We venerate the cross as the instrument of our salvation, for the cross bore our Sacred Victim. In so doing,

we also adore Christ for his saving work.

The final part of the liturgy is Holy Communion. No Masses are celebrated anywhere in the world on Good Friday. Catholics believe that the Mass presents again the Sacrifice of Christ. Today, we have re-presented that with our veneration. We receive hosts consecrated at the Holy Thursday evening Mass at this liturgy.

If you cannot participate in a parish celebration, take some time to read together the Passion according to St. John ([click here](#)). If this seems to daunting, read chapter 19 of John's Gospel. Put a crucifix or a cross on a table or counter where it will be seen to serve as a silent reminder of the day. Spend some time in quiet, reflecting on the crucifixion. Perhaps consider it from the perspective of one of the people mentioned in the Gospel, such as Jesus, Mary, Simon of Cyrene, St. Peter, even Pontius Pilate. Consider what you can learn from them. Abstain from distractions. If you normally have the radio or TV on throughout the day, turn it off. As you do your normal day's work it serves as a reminder that this is a solemn day. On Good Friday we abstain from meat and observe a strict fast.



Holy Saturday

In many ways, Holy Saturday is a day of preparation and waiting. The Easter Vigil is not celebrated until night has fallen. This is a good time to dye Easter eggs, bake the lamb cake, and prepare the Easter baskets. If your parish has a blessing of food, take some of the ingredients of your Easter Brunch or Dinner (or, if you are going out to dine, some other food). Take some time to reflect on the Lord's death and coming resurrection and pray for those who will be baptized and received into the Church at the Easter Vigil.

Easter & Beyond

The entire celebration of the Easter Vigil, considered to be the greatest of all Church feasts, must take place during the night. Unlike a regular Saturday evening Mass, the rules for the Easter Vigil state that it may not begin until after dark (about 30-45 minutes after sunset).

The Vigil begins outside, with only the Easter fire to serve as light. The large Easter Candle is lit. This candle serves as a symbol of Christ's victory over darkness and it is used at baptisms and funerals throughout the year. As the priest lights the candle from the Easter Fire, he says, "May the light of Christ rising in glory dispel the darkness of our hearts and minds." One by one, everyone's candle is lit, passed from person to person. It's amazing to see how light the church becomes with only candlelight.

The second part of the Easter Vigil is the Liturgy of the Word. It is extended at the Vigil and involves several Scripture readings, Psalms and prayers. These call to mind the story of our salvation. It literally begins, "In the beginning" with Creation, and continues as we hear of Abraham's faithfulness, the Exodus out of Egypt, and the words of the Prophets speaking of God's faithfulness. It comes to its culmination with the Gospel describing the faithful women visiting the Lord's tomb and serving as the first witnesses to the Resurrection.

The third part is called the Baptismal liturgy. On this night we baptize, confirm and give first Eucharist to adults who have been in the RCIA. We also welcome people baptized in another faith tradition. This is the perfect night for baptizing as we celebrate Christ's own victory over death. The Christian, through baptism, is dead to sin and alive in Christ.

Finally, in the fourth and final part of the Vigil, the first Eucharist of Easter is celebrated. Those who were baptized and confirmed or welcomed into the Church from another denomination, receive the Eucharist for the first time.

The Easter Sunday Mass is really a joyous extension of the Vigil. The victory has been won for us and all of the world is renewed!

How best to celebrate Easter in the home? First, participate in the celebration of the Easter Vigil and/or Easter Sunday Mass. Wear your Easter best and come ready to sing "Alleluia!" Take some baptismal water home from church (churches sometimes have some ready or you can bring a small jar from home). You can use it throughout the year to bless yourself and your family on special days. Take part in fun activities such as Easter egg hunts, games with the kids, etc. If you gave up a favorite food or activity for Lent, Easter is the day to indulge yourself! Feast...today is the first of a 50 day feasts!

The great thing about Easter is that it lasts for fifty days, until the celebration of Pentecost (June 4, 2017). Try to make the feast last! Have special treats for the family (candy, dessert, family activities) throughout the season for no other reason than to celebrate God's goodness and mercy. Have a nice meal each Sunday of the Easter Season. Eat with family or friends or go out to dinner. Have a glass of wine. Keep in mind, we're doing this because we still are celebrating Easter! Each Sunday, read one of the Gospel accounts of the Resurrection as a family (Matthew, chapter 28; Mark, chapter 16; Luke, chapter 24; John, chapter 20). Use a special dinner prayer during the Easter Season. If you don't normally pray before meals, now is a great time to start.

If you have family traditions or suggestions for celebrating the liturgical year in your home, please email us at worship@straphael.org.

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