

Companions on the Journey

March 20, 2022

Dear Friends,

This is a heads up. Holy Week begins with Palm Sunday on April 10. Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord's Supper is at 7:30pm on April 14. Good Friday's celebration is the Passion of the Lord at 3pm on April 15th. The Easter Vigil celebration is Holy Saturday evening beginning at 8pm with the lighting of the Easter Fire.

None of those celebrations are Holy Days of Obligation. There is no expectation for Catholics to have to attend. However, these are among the most beautiful celebrations which take place each year. On Holy Thursday we incorporate the washing of the feet. We ask parishioners who have lost loved ones over the past year to have their own feet washed but on behalf of their loved one who has died. The whole focus is on the Eucharist and the gift of the priesthood to the Church. We conclude with a procession to the Mary Chapel where an Altar of Repose has been set up to reserve the Eucharistic Blessed Sacrament until the next day.

On Good Friday we begin with the priests and deacons prostrating themselves before the altar of God, lying on the floor of the sanctuary as Jesus lay on the ground of Gethsemane on the night before he died. We read the passion of the Lord. We pray an extended Prayer of the Faithful. We unveil the cross of Jesus Christ and carry it in procession. Everyone present has the opportunity to come forward and kiss the cross or touch the cross or bend their knee before the cross. We conclude with the distribution of Holy Communion. Afterwards the altar is stripped again. Everything is stark, bare, empty. The One whom we call Savior and Lord has been put to death.

The Evening before Easter we celebrate the Easter Vigil. The blessing of the new fire and the lighting of the one single Paschal Candle in the complete and abject darkness signals the darkness of the world in sin when Christ came. He brought his light into our world and although it seems so tiny and insignificant it burns brightly. It is shared one person to another. We process with the Easter Candle up the center aisle. We sing the magnificent Exultet of praise to Christ Our Light.

We read the history of salvation from Genesis through Moses and the exodus and Passover, through the prophets and on into the great rescue of the people of Israel. We culminate all those Old Testament readings with readings from the New Testament and especially about Easter. We sing the Alleluia which has been absent all through Lent.

We bless the baptismal water and we welcome into the Catholic faith those who seek to be converted and baptized into Jesus Christ. The celebrant also confirms them in the faith and they will receive their first Holy Communion. Then there is all manner of joyous singing. Christ our Savior is risen!

Here is a sad fact. The vast majority of Catholics live their entire lives without ever having once participated in any of those Holy Week celebrations. Not because anyone has to. It moves you, fills you, motivates you, restores your hope, draws you closer in your relationship with Christ. There is nothing like it anywhere except in every Catholic Church every year in Holy Week. Do you still want to do something really meaningful for Lent which moves the needle in your relationship with the Lord? Choose to go to one of these celebrations. I suggest Holy Thursday. You will not be the same afterwards. And forget your watch, it isn't about time. It's about spending time with Our Lord in intimacy.

Peace,

Msgr. McHenry