

Companions on the Journey

April 10, 2022

Dear Friends,

Today begins Holy Week. The last two Sundays I have been writing about the Lenten Triduum, the last three days of Holy Week. Holy Thursday. Good Friday. Holy Saturday. I spoke about Palm Sunday and Holy Thursday. Today I speak of Good Friday and Holy Saturday. The Good Friday Service is at 3PM when Jesus died on the cross. It begins with the altars completely stripped. The celebrants enter and they prostrate themselves on the floor of the sanctuary recalling Jesus' own lying prostrate in the Garden of Gethsemane on Holy Thursday right before he is handed over and betrayed.

We read the passion of Jesus from the Gospel of John. We also read the Passion Account on Palm Sunday and we rotate on a three year cycle the Passion from Luke and Matthew and Mark. After we listen to the story of Christ's suffering and death we stand and pray for people, all kinds of people, all who stand in need of prayer. We pray the exact same prayers that all Catholics are praying all over the world. This year we will add special petitions for an end to the pandemic and its devastation and a petition for an end to the war in Ukraine, Ethiopia and Yemen and all those places where violence has broken out.

When the petitions are over a collection is taken up for the worldwide financial support of the Holy Places in the land of Jesus. The deacon then brings up the cross from the rear of the Church, singing: "Behold the wood of the cross on which was hung the Saviour of the world." And we all respond: "Come let us worship." Three times this happens. Then the cross is unveiled slowly to reveal its starkness as an instrument of torture. All who are present in the Church then file forward and bend down to kiss this giant cross or to touch this cross reverently as a sign of respect to Jesus.

We conclude the service by redressing the altar and bringing the Eucharist that we reserved the previous night in the tabernacle over to the altar. We pray the Lord's Prayer and then all present receive communion. We pray and then we remove from this altar the remaining items. The altar is stripped once again. No longer is the Eucharist even reserved in the Altar of Repose. The Lord is absent from church those days. You can feel his absence. On no other day in the course of the year does our church feel as it does on Holy Saturday.

On Holy Saturday night, we begin by turning off all the lights in the church and the hallways. In the pitch darkness we light a fire in a brazier in the Narthex. As it burns we bless the fire and take a flame and light a large candle called the Paschal Candle or Easter Candle. We then process carrying the candle and singing: "Christ our Light." We all sing our response: "Thanks be to God." And from that one candle which represents Christ, we light the tapers being held by all who are present. The light of the Easter candle is passed on to the candles of those present to worship. Thus it is that our faith is passed from one to another—just as in real life. Those who are to be baptized are baptized but first we bless the water that we will use. The Easter water will be used to wash away the sins of all being baptized just as it does for all who are baptized into Christ.

I strongly encourage you to make an effort to attend and participate in one of the three days of the Easter triduum. It will touch you deeply and strengthen your faith. Most Catholics live their whole lives without ever having experienced the beauty, the depth, the profound mystery celebrated in these wonderful ceremonies. If you make the effort you will truly be rewarded. See you there.

Peace,

Msgr. McHenry