

Holy Week: Ideas for families

Since the early days of Christianity, the week beginning with Palm Sunday and ending at sundown on Easter has been a sacred time because it commemorates the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Here are some faith-filled ideas to help you keep the holy in Holy Week.

Palm Sunday

Begin your celebration of the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem at Mass by holding your palms high as the priest blesses them. Then continue the celebration at home.

- Put a small statue of Jesus in the center of your dinner table.
- Use palm branches from church and have your own triumphal procession to the dinner table.

Talk about it: Over dinner, talk about how Jesus is the center of our lives and our faith. How do we feel when we make Jesus the center of our lives?

Holy Week Preparation Days

Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday

- Clean the house: Think of spring housekeeping as a prayerful preparation for Easter in the same way that Jewish families clean in preparation for Passover.
- Buy a lily: The white flower heralds the resurrection of Jesus. Let your children pick out one for your family and one for someone who needs to hear “good news.”
- Color eggs: Decorated eggs are a symbol of new life that comes with the Resurrection. Make it more meaningful by helping your children write “Christ is Risen,” “Alleluia” or “Jesus loves us” on the eggs in crayon before coloring them.

Holy Thursday

This day recalls the Last Supper when Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. It reminds us that we are called to serve one another. Here are some ideas for celebrating the day

- Go to Mass: The Holy Thursday liturgy marks the beginning of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. At the end of Mass, join in the procession to move the Blessed Sacrament to an altar of repose.
- Help someone: Do something special for someone in need.
- Share a meal: If your parish doesn't host a shared supper on Holy Thursday, plan your own with neighbors or friends. Be sure to read one of the Gospel accounts of the Last Supper .

Talk about it: The Eucharist is the central sacrament in our Catholic faith. Talk about our Catholic belief that we receive the real presence of the risen Jesus in holy Communion. How does this encounter with Jesus change us?

Good Friday

This day commemorates the crucifixion, death and burial of Jesus. It is the most solemn and sorrowful day of the Church calendar.

- Attend the Good Friday liturgy, which includes the reading of the Passion, Veneration of the Cross, special prayers and holy Communion.
- Set aside some prayerful family time between 12 noon and 3 p.m.
- Encourage family members to imitate Jesus by forgiving someone who has hurt them.

Talk about it: It is OK to feel sad on Good Friday. Jesus' death on the cross is a sacrifice like no other; he died to teach us about everlasting life. Talk about friends and family who may have died and how we believe that, because of Jesus, we hope to rise to new life in heaven.

Holy Saturday

This day commemorates the time of darkness and waiting when Jesus was in the tomb. It is also a day for final preparations before Easter.

- Invite family members, friends and neighbors – especially people who have strayed from the Church – to come to church with you for the Easter Vigil or for Mass on Easter morning.
- Volunteer as a family to help decorate the Church for the Easter Vigil.
- On Holy Saturday, gather the family around a bonfire in the backyard. Roast marshmallows and sing campfire songs as a sign of “keeping vigil” until Jesus rises.

Talk about it: The Easter Vigil begins with the symbol of fire. Talk about how fire represents that Jesus is the light of the world. He brings light to the darkness and new life to a sleeping world. What are some other symbols of resurrection? (Water, the color white, the transformation of a butterfly ...)

Easter Sunday

Celebrate the risen Lord at Mass with the singing of the Gloria and alleluias, the renewal of baptismal vows, a sprinkling with Easter water and receiving the Eucharist. The time you spend on your Holy Week preparations will make Easter Sunday more meaningful for the whole family!