

25 things for your kids to spot during Palm Sunday and Triduum

Technically, Triduum spans three days—from the evening of Holy Thursday until the evening of Easter Sunday—but liturgically, it is “one day,” one long celebration of the Paschal Mystery. Triduum culminates in the Easter Vigil, which is the high point of the entire liturgical year.

As with the Sunday liturgy, reviewing what will happen at the liturgy in advance is a good way to help your kids participate with understanding and reverence. Use the lists below to give your kids a heads up before going to church—and challenge them to notice each item during the service.

4 things for kids to look for at church on Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord

Holy Week kicks off with Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord. First we hear about Jesus’ king-like entry into the holy city of Jerusalem . . . on a donkey? Not a very kingly way to ride, but that’s Jesus’ point: he is a new kind of king, the King of Peace foretold by the prophets. Then we hear a long reading about the Last Supper, and Jesus’ Passion, Look for:

1. **Red vestments.** Because we hear the Passion today, the priest wears red vestments. Red is the symbol of martyrs, of whom Christ is the prototype.
2. **Procession before Mass.** In most places, people will gather before Mass to bless palm branches and hear the story of Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem from the Gospel of Matthew. Then that triumphant entry is re-enacted as the people process into the church singing a song of praise and waving palm branches.
3. **Palms, a symbol of victory.** In most places, palm

branches are distributed to the assembly before Mass. In the ancient world, palms were symbols of victory, given to athletes, military leaders, and kings. If we are waving palm branches, what role do we assume from the Gospel reading?

4. **We hear the Passion from the Gospel of Luke.** We hear a very long Gospel reading of the Passion—that is, the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. Usually, the Passion is read by several different readers; the assembly may assume the role of the crowd demanding Jesus' death. How does it make you feel to shout, "Crucify him!"? What is the Church saying by casting us in the role of Jesus' persecutors?

8 things for your kids to look for at church on Holy Thursday

1. **Reception of the Holy Oils.** Before Mass begins, you might participate in a short ritual to receive the holy oils blessed by the bishop during the Chrism Mass. These oils—the Oil of the Sick, the Oil of Catechumens, and the holy Chrism—will be used by the parish in the sacraments of Anointing, Confirmation, and Baptism throughout the year.
2. **Focus on the Last Supper and the institution of the Eucharist.** Point out to your kids that it is at this Mass that we remember in a special way the night that Jesus gave us the Eucharist. You can read the Gospel in advance, perhaps during your family meal.
3. **Washing of the feet.** The Gospel of John recalls how Jesus washed the feet of his disciples as an example of the sort of charity and service they should practice in his name; in this way, the Gospel intimately links the Eucharist with service. Your parish may or may not include a washing of the feet ritual. In some

parishes, the priest washes the feet of twelve individuals representing the twelve apostles; in other places, parishioners wash one another's feet as a reminder of our baptismal call to imitate Jesus' example.

4. **Gifts for the poor.** The Church has traditionally collected gifts for the poor on this day. Your parish might have a special collection, or collect your CRS rice bowl donations.
5. **"Ubi caritas est vera, Deus ibi est."** You may sing this ancient hymn during the washing of the feet or the collection for the poor; the words mean, "Where true charity is, there is God."
6. **Transfer of the Eucharist.** In most places, after communion, the Eucharist is transferred to a closed tabernacle or pyx in another specially prepared place, where it is reserved until the Good Friday service. Typically, the Blessed Sacrament is carried through the church in a procession while the hymn "Pange lingua" is sung.
7. **Stripping of the altar.** After Mass, the altar cloths will be stripped, and any crosses in the church may be covered with a red or purple veil.
8. **Eucharistic adoration.** When the procession bearing the Blessed Sacrament reaches the place where it will be reserved, the assembly is encouraged to remain in the place for some time in prayerful adoration. Never tried Eucharistic adoration before? Check out [Ways to do Eucharistic Adoration with kids](#).

6 things for your kids to look for at church on Good Friday

Many families have difficulty getting to church on Good Friday, but if you are able to attend, give your kids a heads

up about what to expect:

1. **No Liturgy of the Eucharist.** Although you will probably receive the Eucharist, the consecrated hosts are those reserved from Holy Thursday. It is an ancient practice of the church to not celebrate the Liturgy of the Eucharist on Good Friday.
2. **A silent beginning.** The service begins without music or singing; the atmosphere is one of sadness and grieving for the sins of humanity and the suffering and death of Christ.
3. **The prostration of the priest.** Notice that the priest prostrates himself before the altar, a sign of the grieving of the Church and the abasement of man.
4. **Solemn intercessions.** On Good Friday, the whole Church prays the Solemn Intercessions, an expanded form of the prayers of intercession signifying that Christ died for the whole world. (Can your kids remember which groups are mentioned specifically in the intentions?)
5. **Veneration of the cross.** During the veneration of the cross, the assembly is invited to approach the cross and offer some form of veneration—kneeling in prayer, kissing the wood of the cross, etc. We venerate the cross because this instrument of suffering and death was transformed by the blood of Christ into the means of our salvation.
6. **Stripping of the altar.** The altar is stripped bare at the end of the service, and everyone leaves in reverent silence.

7 things for your kids to look for at the Easter Vigil

If you can make it to your parish's Easter Vigil service, do—it is the high point of the entire liturgical year, and much different from the Easter morning services. The service

is longer than a typical Mass; expect it to run between one and a half and two and a half hours, depending on your parish and how elaborate the liturgy is.

Give your kids a heads-up about these elements of the Easter Vigil:

1. **The dark.** The Easter Vigil takes place after sunset on Holy Saturday, to highlight the Church's vigil, or waiting, for the resurrection of the Lord. The darkness of the night and of the church symbolizes sin and death, and echoes the Hebrews' night time waiting for the passover of the Lord on the eve of their liberation from slavery in Egypt.
2. **The fire.** In most places, there will be a large fire burning outside the doors of the church. The service begins with the blessing of this paschal fire and the lighting of the paschal candle from the fire. (*Paschal* is a Latin word meaning "Easter.")
3. **The procession of the paschal candle.** The paschal candle, representing the light of Christ rising from the tomb, is brought into the darkened church. The smaller candles held by the assembly are lit from the paschal candle as it makes its way into the Church, symbolizing the new life each of us receives from Christ. This makes a great allegory for kids: Point out to them that just as the church brightens as the light of Christ spreads from person to person, so too is the world transformed when we spread the light of Christ in it.
4. **The Exsultet.** Once the church has been fully lit, the deacon intones the Exsultet, an ancient hymn of praise for God's saving work in human history, culminating in the resurrection of Christ. (If there is no deacon present, the priest or a cantor sings the Exsultet.) You can preview the [text of the Exsultet](#) with your kids, or learn more about the origins [and significance of this hymn from Father Michael J. Flynn](#).
5. **The Liturgy of the Word: Seven readings.** The Easter

Vigil normally includes seven readings, five from the Old Testament and two from the New Testament, each interspersed with a sung psalm. That's a lot of readings! In some places, the number of readings is shortened to five. Point out to your children that each of the readings relates to another stage of salvation history... that is, the history of God's saving work among his people.

6. **The blessing of the baptismal waters.** The waters of baptism are blessed and sprinkled on the assembly.
7. **Rites of initiation.** Those who have been preparing to enter the Church (catechumens) usually do so at the Easter Vigil, so your kids may also get to witness the baptism and/or confirmation of one or more children or adults. The whole season of Lent had its origins around the preparation of catechumens for reception into the Church.

In some places, the Easter Vigil is followed by a festive celebration; but if this isn't the tradition in your parish, you can celebrate in your own way at home...or just collapse into bed and celebrate the next morning!