

Walking through Holy Week as a family

The week between Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday, Holy Week, is the most sacred time of year. During this special time, we enter into the passion of Christ – his crucifixion, death and resurrection – through liturgical celebration and personal conversion. While the season of Lent is a very important time in the Church, it is helpful to remember that our Lenten practices (prayer, fasting and almsgiving) are meant as preparation for the three days of the Triduum.

What Is the Triduum?

The three days of the Triduum are counted as the Hebrews counted their days, from dusk to dusk. Lent officially ends and the Triduum begins at dusk on Holy Thursday and continues through dusk on Easter Sunday. Because we cannot separate Jesus' death from his resurrection, the Church teaches that the Triduum is really one celebration that lasts for three days. However, in the liturgy, each day has its unique qualities and different focuses.

Holy Thursday

So when he had washed their feet [and] put his garments back on and reclined at table again, he said to them, "Do you realize what I have done for you?" ~ John 13:12

The evening Mass on Holy Thursday begins the Sacred Triduum. On this night we remember the Last Supper and celebrate the institution of the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Holy Orders. At the end of the liturgy, the sanctuary is stripped clean in preparation for the most somber of feasts, Good Friday.

Family Faith Activity: Talk about how Jesus is really present in holy Communion and how sharing in his body strengthens us

to become the Body of Christ and to follow him each day.

Good Friday

He said, "It is finished." And bowing his head, he handed over the spirit. ~ John 19:30

Good Friday is a somber remembrance of Jesus' crucifixion and death on the cross. It is a day of fasting and penance and a time to examine all of the places in our lives where we fail to follow Christ and fall into sin. Good Friday is not merely a commemoration of a historical event; rather, Christ's sacrificial death on the cross, along with his glorious resurrection, comprise the heart of the Christian faith.

Good Friday is not a Mass; holy Communion that is distributed had been consecrated on Holy Thursday and kept in the tabernacle for adoration. Also, many parishes offer Stations of the Cross on Good Friday.

Family Faith Activity: Pray the Lord's Prayer at bedtime on this night in remembrance of Christ's gift for all of salvation.

Easter Vigil

Now in the place where he had been crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had yet been buried. So they laid Jesus there. ~ John 19:41-42

The Easter Vigil is the restoration of the early Church's tradition as the great celebration of adult baptism and confirmation. It is the high point in the liturgical year. The vigil begins in darkness (usually outside) and the long procession of candlelight that enlivens the church reminds us that Jesus is the light of the world who has conquered all darkness and death. The Paschal candle that is lit at the Easter Vigil will remain in the church throughout the year as a sign of Christ's death and resurrection.

Family Faith Activity: During the day on Holy Saturday, spend some time as a family talking about the Paschal Mystery – Jesus’ crucifixion, death and resurrection. Take a walk around your neighborhood looking for signs of new life in springtime. Talk about how Jesus rising to new life is truly transformative and life-changing.

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!

3 Simple Ways to Celebrate Holy Week

1. Give yourself (and your family) the gift of quiet time for prayer and reflection in front of your home altar early in the morning or late at night.
2. Move your crucifix to the front door (or the door you use most) as a remembrance of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross.
3. During Holy Week, turn off your car radio and pray silently while driving.