

## Thoughts for an *Extraordinary* Passiontide

**Name:** Even though the penitential exercises of Lent continue, the Church shifts her liturgical focus during the last two weeks of this season onto the Passion of Christ. For this reason, these last two weeks of Lent are given the name of “Passiontide.” The last week of Passiontide, which contains the days which liturgically present the last week of Our Lord’s earthly life, is called “Holy Week,” or “The Great Week.” The last three days of Holy Week (Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday) are called the “*Triduum*.” This Latin word means “three days” and here means “The Three Days.”

**Themes:** The themes from Lent (preparation for Easter, spiritual warfare, spiritual title of the year, Public Penitents, preparation for Baptism, and the history of the conspiracy that led to Christ’s Crucifixion) and Septuagesima (exile) are still present, but the focus is now on the Passion of Christ.

Holy Week serves as the immediate preparation for Easter. Each day of Holy Week makes present the final events of Our Lord’s earthly life:

- **Palm Sunday** – Christ triumphantly entered into Jerusalem and conducted His second cleansing of the Temple.
- **Holy Monday** – The Gospel of this day recounts the events of the Saturday immediately before Palm Sunday when Mary Magdalen anointed Christ in preparation for His burial. This event is considered the beginning of Christ’s Passion. On this Monday, Christ taught in the Temple and, on His return to Bethania (Bethany), prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world.
- **Holy Tuesday** – Again, Christ taught in the Temple and then returned to Bethania.
- **Holy Wednesday** – This day is also known as “Spy Wednesday” in reference to Judas’ betrayal of Christ to the Jewish High Priests.
- **Holy Thursday** – Christ celebrated the Last Supper in which He kept the Jewish Passover, instituted the Holy Eucharist and said the First Mass (which are chiefly commemorated in today’s Mass), ordained the Apostles as the first Priests of the New Testament, instructed them on how to consecrate the Holy Oils (which is why the blessing of the Holy Oils traditionally occurs on this day), and washed the feet of the Apostles. After the Last Supper, He underwent His agony in the Garden and was arrested. This day is also known as “Maundy Thursday.” The word “Maundy” comes from the Latin word *mandatum*, meaning “command” or “commandment.” *Mandatum* is the first word in the first antiphon chanted during the Washing of the Feet ceremony (“the *Mandatum*” ceremony). The beginning of this antiphon reads: “*Mandatum novum do vobis / A new commandment I give unto you*” (Joh 13:34). The Stripping of the Altar commemorates Our Lord falling into the hands of His enemies who will strip Him of His garments multiple times. It was on this day that Public Penitents were anciently reconciled.
- **Good Friday** – Christ’s Passion, Crucifixion, Death, and Burial. So vividly is the Church impressed with the remembrance of the great Sacrifice offered today on Calvary, that she refrains from renewing on her Altars the unbloody immolation of the Divine Victim (the Mass): she contents herself with partaking of the sacred mystery by Communion.
- **Holy Saturday** – His Body rested in the tomb and His Soul descended into the Limbo of the Fathers.

**Length of Passiontide:** Passiontide is, including Sundays, 14 days long.

**Gloria?:** The *Gloria* is too joyful for this penitential season so it is absent from the Masses of Passiontide, except during the Mass of Holy Thursday due to its festal character. It is, however, used on feast days, if any occur. As a result, the *Gloria* is practically absent from this season.

**Alleluia?:** No, the absence of the *Alleluia*, which is a sign of our exile from our heavenly home, continues from Septuagesima.

**Liturgical Colors:** While the predominating color of the season is violet, which denotes affliction and sadness, other colors are also present. The red on Palm Sunday (where it is used) represents royal victory, the white on Holy Thursday represents joy, and the black on Good Friday represents deepest mourning and grief.

**Organ and Flowers?:** In order to create an atmosphere proper to the time, the Altar is not decorated with flowers. Additionally, the organ is not to be used unless it is necessary. The organ, however, can be played during the *Gloria* of the Mass of Holy Thursday, and flowers used, due to its festal character. Palms may decorate the Altar on Palm Sunday.

**Proper Masses and Preface?:** Proper Masses and/or liturgical celebration(s) are assigned for each day of Passiontide. During Passiontide, the Preface of the Holy Cross is used. In keeping with the theme of Passiontide, this Preface focuses on the redemption won for us by Christ on the Cross. On Holy Thursday, the Preface of the Holy Eucharist may be used.

**Veiled Images?:** The ending of the Gospel on Passion Sunday (the first Sunday of Passiontide) reads: “But Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple” (Joh 8:59). To express this great humiliation of Christ, the Church, before First Vespers of Passion Sunday (the Saturday evening before), covers the images of Him in violet (with the exception of the Stations of the Cross so that the faithful may still undertake this exercise). Since the Master is in hiding, it is fitting that (the images of) His followers should also be in hiding. The Crucifixes remain veiled until the unveiling ceremony on Good Friday. All of the other images will be unveiled during the Easter Vigil.

**Prayers at the Foot and *Gloria Patri*?:** In the Masses of Passiontide, the Prayers at the Foot of the Altar are shortened and the *Gloria Patri* (Glory be to the Father) is omitted. The joy expressed in the excluded portions of the Prayers at the Foot and in the *Gloria Patri* would be out of place during this season. The *Gloria Patri* also progressively disappears from the Divine Office.

**The Passions?:** On Palm Sunday, Holy Tuesday, Holy Wednesday, and Good Friday, the Gospel accounts of the Passion are read in order (St. Matthew’s account on Sunday, St. Mark’s on Tuesday, St. Luke’s on Wednesday, and St. John’s on Friday). When the Passion is chanted three tones are used. One is for Christ (*Christus*), one is for the narrator (*Chronista*), and the third is for everyone else (and is called the *Synagoga*). The ministers chanting the Passion wear violet (black on Good Friday) Deacon stoles. To express the sorrow which fills the hearts of the faithful, the acolytes do not carry candles and incense is not used. After the Death of the Lord is announced, all kneel in mournful adoration and thanksgiving. In some places, a special tone is used at the conclusion.

***Tenebrae*?:** During the *Triduum*, the Divine Office is altered to reflect the somberness of the days. The most impressive of these changes is the celebration of Matins and Lauds. The joint celebration of Matins and Lauds on these days is called *Tenebrae*, which is Latin for “darkness,” as these ceremonies took place during the night. During the celebration, a large triangular candlestick (the *Tenebrae* Hearse) holding 15 unbleached (yellow) candles is placed on the Epistle Side of the Sanctuary. The color of the candles adds to the somberness of the celebration. At the end of each of the Psalms, one of the candles is extinguished, leaving only the top-center one lit at the end. Then, during the *Benedictus* the 6 candles on the Altar are extinguished. Then, at the end of the Office, while all are kneeling, the remaining candle is carried behind the Altar and all present make noise according to local custom (banging books, knocking on the choir stalls, etc.). This extinguishing of the candles represents the Apostles and Disciples abandoning Christ. The placement of the remaining candle alone near the Altar represents Christ’s Crucifixion and Death. The hiding of this candle represents the obscuring, but not extinguishing, of Christ’s glory during these days and also during His burial. The noise represents the confusion of nature at the death of its Lord. When the candle returns, showing that through all this that Christ is still the Light of the World, the noise stops and the ceremony is over. The entire ceremony serves as a funeral service or dirge for Christ, the three days of mourning referring to the three days in the Tomb (even if one is anticipated).

**Palms?:** The Sunday of Holy Week (the second week of Passiontide) is known as “Palm Sunday” due to the procession with blessed palms that takes place before the start of the Mass proper. This procession is inspired by the one made by Our Lord into Jerusalem on the Sunday before His Passion during which He was greeted by those carrying palms. Palm branches are symbols of joy (Lev 23:40), victory over enemies, and, for the Christian, especially the victory over the flesh and the world (see Ps 91:13). These palms are then taken home by the faithful. The blessing of the palms is traditionally done from the Epistle Corner and is one of the three traditional blessings done there (the other two are the candles at Candlemas and the ashes on Ash Wednesday). In some places, however, they are blessed elsewhere. The striking of the closed church doors with the Processional Cross (where it is done) during the procession, symbolizes that the closed doors of heaven were opened to us by the Cross of Christ. This day is also known as the “Second Sunday of the Passion” (or “Second Passion Sunday”).

**Bells?:** After the bells are rung during the *Gloria* of Holy Thursday, they fall silent in order to express a sentiment of mournfulness and to symbolize that the world lost all its melody and joy when its Savior suffered and was crucified. These sentiments are reinforced by the jarring noise made by the *crotalus* (“rattle” or “clapper”) which replaces the bells. The absence of the bells, as bells can represent the Apostles, reminds us also of how the Apostles fled from the Garden.

***Pax*?:** The *Pax* is omitted on Holy Thursday as a protest against the wicked use of it by Judas in betraying Our Lord.

**Holy Water Fonts?:** The Holy Water fonts are emptied on Holy Thursday and will be filled with the Lustral/Easter Water blessed during the Easter Vigil. From this time, it is also forbidden to light votive candles. This is to ensure that all candlelight during the Vigil originates from the Easter Fire.