

Three Days to Rediscover Our Identity in Christ

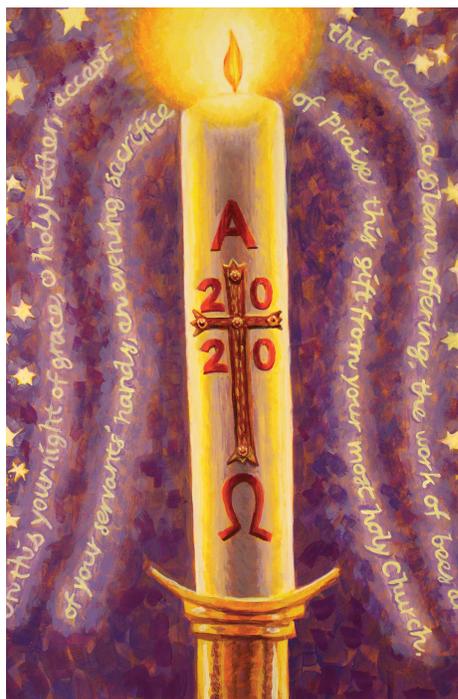
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During the Passover seder, the youngest person at the table asks, “Why is this night different from all other nights?” The leader then names those things that make the Passover seder different from other holiday meals. As we prepare for the Sacred Paschal Triduum, we may ask, “What makes these days different from all other days?”

The word *Triduum* is a Latin word that means “three days.” The Church calls the three days before Easter—Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday—the “culmination of the entire liturgical year” (*General Norms of the Liturgical Year and the Calendar*, 18). During the span of seventy-two hours, the community commemorates the core of what they believe—Christ, crucified, buried, and risen—as well as the heart of who the community is—a people freed and forgiven, restored and renewed by Christ’s resurrection.

These mysteries are too much for one day. They must take place over several days. Even so, the Church observes them as one unified celebration, designing them to flow one into another. On Holy Thursday, the Evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper ends without a dismissal, continuing into the night, and perhaps the next morning, with adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. On Friday, the Celebration of the Passion of the Lord begins without a greeting and ends without a dismissal. On Holy Saturday, the Easter Vigil begins after nightfall.

To prepare for the Sacred Triduum, members of the community clear their calendars to journey with Christ, with the elect who will receive the initiation sacraments at the Vigil, and with one another through death to new life. This journey demands spiritual preparation that is different from other major feasts. With the exception of the sacraments of penance and the anointing of the sick, the Church abstains



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from celebrating any sacraments on Good Friday and Holy Saturday. The tabernacle is empty from the beginning of the Mass of the Lord’s Supper to the end of Holy Communion at the Easter Vigil. Even the environment is made bare. On Holy Thursday, the altar is stripped and crosses are removed so that the Celebration of the Passion of the Lord begins without a cross, without candles, and without cloths on the altar. The faithful keep a paschal fast that anticipates the joy of Christ’s resurrection.

During the Triduum, the Church’s most powerful Scriptures are proclaimed, special rituals are performed, and symbols are employed. The washing of feet is reserved for the Mass of the Lord’s Supper on Holy Thursday. The adoration of the cross is observed only at the Celebration of the Passion of the Lord on Good Friday. The community gathered after dark under the shadow of a full moon is called for only at the

Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday. The lighting and blessing of a fire, and the community processing behind the Paschal candle takes place only at the Easter Vigil. Unlike the common practice of celebrating Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist on separate occasions, the Triduum brings these three sacraments of initiation together in one grand liturgy.

The three days that make up the Triduum are different because, unlike any other days in the liturgical year, the community walks through the most profound mysteries of its faith. We encounter Christ in the most solemn Scriptures, rituals, and symbols of our tradition. If we do this well, we will be drawn into a deeper intimacy with Christ’s dying and rising. We will know Christ’s victory over death as ours. We will rediscover who we truly are—a chosen people, the beloved of God, unafraid of death, assured of new life.