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HOLY WEEK

EASTERTIDE

— From the Director of the Archdiocesan Office of Worship & Spiritual Life —

From Memory to Mystery: The Ancient Origins of Holy Week



THERE is something astonishing about Holy Week. Each year, we walk the familiar path—palms waving in joy, feet washed in silence, a cross lifted high, and a tomb waiting for dawn. And yet, every year, something feels new. What we are experiencing is not a re-enactment. It is a return. A return to the very heart of the Church's faith: the Paschal Mystery.

But this journey is not a recent invention. Holy Week is as old as the Church herself, emerging not as a program or plan, but as the instinctive, organic response of Christians to the saving events of Christ's Passion, Death, and Resurrection.

The earliest historical records of Holy Week celebrations come from the 4th century. One of the most vivid testimonies is the *Peregrinatio Egeriae* (The Pilgrimage of Egeria), a travel journal written by a Spanish nun around the year 381. In it, she documents her visit to the Christian communities of Jerusalem, where the faithful observed an elaborate and highly devotional series of liturgies stretching from Palm Sunday to Easter. She describes, in loving detail, how the bishop would read the Gospel at the very place it happened—Gethsemane, Calvary, the Mount of Olives—bringing the scriptures to life in time and space. It was, even then, a week set apart.

But even before Egeria's pen touched parchment, the seeds of Holy Week were already sprouting in the soil of early Christian memory. As early as the 3rd century—and possibly before—there are indications that the Church in places like Egypt, Cappadocia (modern-day Turkey), and Armenia were gathering for commemorations of Christ's Passion. These weren't full-fledged Holy Weeks as we know them today, but they were clearly the early flowering of what would become the Church's most solemn and sacred time.

Continued on Page 2.

By the 5th century, these traditions had made their way westward. In Rome and throughout Europe, the Church began to shape the celebration of the Triduum—the Great Three Days—into a distinct liturgical unit. Palm processions, the washing of feet, the veneration of the Cross, the lighting of the new fire—all these elements were added gradually, harmonizing East and West, Scripture and tradition, time and eternity.

Liturgical historians have noted that the development of Holy Week was not primarily theological but mystagogical—that is, it was intended to draw the faithful into the mystery they were celebrating. Holy Week was—and remains—not just a recollection of what Jesus did, but an invitation to enter into what He is doing now, in His Body, the Church. In this sense, the week is not about dramatization but participation.

Today, the Church's rites retain the ancient shape of those early centuries. From the solemn entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday to the stillness of Holy Saturday, we walk in the footsteps of countless generations. The readings, chants, symbols, and silences are saturated with centuries of meaning. And yet, the power of Holy Week is not in its antiquity—it is in its immediacy. Christ still dies. Christ still rises. And He does so for us, here and now.

As we prepare once again to enter these sacred days, we do so as heirs of a great tradition. Not simply of texts and rituals, but of faithful memory—a memory passed down through time, tested by persecution, shaped by councils, nourished in monasteries, refined through reform, and carried forward by ordinary believers.

This is the week that shaped the Church.

This is the week that defines us.

Let us live it with reverence, with joy, and with wonder.

- Fr. Vigoa



Preparing for Holy Week: Practical and Liturgical Considerations



AS LENT progresses, Holy Week draws near—a time of profound mystery, solemnity, and grace. The liturgies of this sacred time are among the most beautiful and powerful in the Church's calendar, requiring careful preparation and attention to detail. This is a time for clergy, and parishioners to fully enter into the Paschal Mystery, ensuring that all aspects of Holy Week are well-planned and executed with reverence.

Below are some key considerations to keep in mind as we approach Holy Week.

1. Proper Disposal of Previous Year's Holy Oils

With the upcoming Chrism Mass, now is the time to ensure that last year's holy oils are properly disposed of. According to Canon 847 §2 and the instructions from the Rite of Blessing of Oils, any leftover Sacred Chrism, Oil of Catechumens, and Oil of the Sick should be absorbed into a sacramental material (such as cotton) and then burned.

Priests should obtain fresh oils at the Chrism Mass, where the archbishop blesses them for use in the coming year. It is also customary to make a donation to the Cathedral of Saint Mary in gratitude for the sacred oils, with a suggested donation of \$100 or more, as one's parish budget allows.

2. The Washing of the Feet: Who and How Many?

The Mandatum on Holy Thursday—the ritual washing of the feet—has evolved over time. While traditionally limited to twelve men, Pope Francis broadened the practice in 2016, allowing for the inclusion of women and people from all walks of life. This powerful moment reflects Christ's command: "I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do" (John 13:15).

- How many people? While twelve is a traditional number, it is not required. Parishes may adjust as needed to reflect the broader community of discipleship.
- Who can participate? The rite now invites all the faithful, highlighting the universal call to humble service and charity.
- How should it be done? The washing should be conducted with dignity, reverence, and simplicity, allowing for quiet reflection on Christ's example.

3. Creating Meaningful Opportunities for Participation

Holy Week offers unique moments for the faithful to enter more deeply into the Paschal Mystery. Consider incorporating additional spiritual opportunities for parishioners:

- Tenebrae Service of Light: A Liturgy of Shadows held during the Triduum, with the gradual extinguishing of candles, readings, and solemn music. This prayerful experience invites deep reflection on Christ's suffering.
- Soup and Bread Night: A simple Lenten meal on Holy Wednesday to remind us of fasting, charity, and the humility of Christ before the Paschal Triduum.
- Expanded Confession Times: Offering Confession on Good Friday and Holy Saturday mornings allows more people to approach the Easter Sacraments fully reconciled.
- Sacred Silence on Holy Saturday Morning: The hours before the Easter Vigil are meant to be filled with prayer and expectation. Consider setting up a quiet, sacred space in the church for reflection.



4. Thoughtfully Designing the Altar of Repose for Holy Thursday

The Altar of Repose is one of the most significant focal points of Holy Thursday, where the Eucharist is placed for adoration following the Mass of the Lord's Supper.

- What is appropriate? According to *Paschale Solemnitatis* (55-56), the altar should be in a space that encourages silent prayer and meditation, adorned with flowers and candles but maintaining a sense of solemnity rather than festivity.
- Symbolic Elements: Parishes may incorporate elements that reflect Gethsemane, reminding the faithful of Christ's agony in the garden.
- Adoration: Encourage extended hours for the faithful to "keep watch" with the Lord until midnight or later.

5. Early Planning for the Easter Triduum

Holy Week liturgies require careful coordination of ministers, music, and logistics. Some key elements to plan ahead:

- Good Friday's Adoration of the Cross: This year, the veneration of the cross on Good Friday may once again follow the traditional practice we knew before the pandemic. The Archbishop has permitted a return to individual veneration, allowing the faithful, if they choose, to come forward and reverently kiss, or touch the cross, restoring a powerful and personal moment of devotion. At the same time, parishes may also opt for the communal veneration of one large cross, inviting the assembly to venerate silently and prayerfully from their places in the pews. Both forms are valid and meaningful, offering the faithful a chance to unite their hearts to Christ's Passion in a way that is both reverent and pastorally sensitive.
- Paschal Candle: According to the Roman Missal and the Ceremonial of Bishops, only one Paschal Candle is to be blessed and lit at the Easter Vigil. The significance of the candle is deeply symbolic — it represents Christ, the one true Light who conquered sin and death.
- The Exsultet, the ancient Easter proclamation, beautifully declares the meaning of this single flame:
"May this flame be found still burning by the Morning Star: the one Morning Star who never sets, Christ your Son..."

- While the temptation may arise to bless multiple Paschal Candles for convenience, especially in parishes with mission churches or additional worship sites, the proper liturgical practice is clear. Only the principal Paschal Candle should be blessed and used for the Easter Vigil. However, once the Vigil is concluded, the blessed flame from the main candle may be used to light additional Paschal Candles for other locations. This ensures both pastoral care and adherence to liturgical norms.
- The Paschal Candle must be made of real wax: the Paschal Candle must be made of genuine wax, as stated in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) and reinforced in other liturgical guidelines. The wax symbolizes the humanity of Christ, who took on flesh and gave Himself completely for our salvation. The gradual melting of the candle throughout the Easter season serves as a visible reminder of Christ's sacrifice — pouring Himself out for the world. The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments has also specified that artificial or non-wax candles are not appropriate for liturgical use. Natural wax candles, preferably made of beeswax, are traditional and deeply symbolic. Additionally, the purity and authenticity of a real wax candle enhance the reverence and solemnity of the Easter Vigil celebration.

Holy Week is the summit of the liturgical year, a time when the Church enters into the very mystery of Christ's Passion, Death, and Resurrection. Through proper preparation, both practical and spiritual, we can ensure that our communities experience these sacred days in a way that is orderly, prayerful, and deeply transformative. -RJV

Sacred Oils: What We Display and What We Use

AS MENTIONED earlier, each year at the Chrism Mass, parishes receive the freshly blessed and consecrated Sacred Oils—the Oil of the Sick, the Oil of Catechumens, and the Sacred Chrism—from the Archbishop, signifying our unity with the local Church and the apostolic ministry. In many parishes, it has become customary to display these oils in beautiful ambry cases, often in larger, more decorative vessels than what was received. While this can serve as a powerful catechetical sign for the faithful, it's important to remember that what is received at the Chrism Mass should be used to celebrate the sacraments. If a larger vessel is used for display, care must be taken to ensure it does not create confusion: the oils used in anointing should be those blessed and consecrated by the bishop each year, not symbolic or "display-only" oil. This maintains the integrity of the sacramental signs and reminds us that these oils come from the bishop, who is the sign of unity in the local Church.



Standing with Christ: A Reminder for the Reading of the Passion



RECENTLY, during a lunch conversation with a few fellow priests, the topic of Holy Week came up—as it always does this time of year. One priest shared, with some enthusiasm, that in his parish he instructs the faithful to sit during the reading of the Passion on Palm Sunday and Good Friday. His reasoning? “It’s too long,” he said, “and people can concentrate better when they’re seated.”

According to the rubrics of the Roman Missal, the faithful are clearly instructed to stand for the proclamation of the Passion, just as we do for any Gospel reading. Yes, it is long. Yes, it requires attention. And yes—it’s supposed to.

To stand for the Passion is a deeply symbolic act. It is a posture

of reverence, of solidarity, of readiness. We stand not because it’s comfortable, but because we are standing with Christ, walking with Him through His suffering, death, and love poured out. To casually dismiss that by inviting everyone to sit is to diminish the power of the moment—and to introduce personal preference where the Church has spoken clearly.

Holy Week is not the time to get “creative” with the liturgy. It is the time to enter fully into the mystery, humbly and faithfully. Let’s not be tempted to do “our own thing.” Let’s do what the Church gives us, beautifully and reverently. That is how we serve our people best.

Let’s be clear: don’t do this in your parish. Stand with Christ. Teach your people why we stand. And trust that even discomfort, when united with the Passion, becomes part of the offering. -RJV

The Easter Vigil: Reserved for Catechumens in the Archdiocese of Miami

AS WE draw closer to the celebration of the Easter Vigil, questions often arise about the proper time and place for the reception of the Sacraments of Initiation. A particularly common question is:

Can baptized Catholics be confirmed at the Easter Vigil?

In the Archdiocese of Miami, the answer is clear: No. The Easter Vigil is exclusively reserved for catechumens — those who have never been baptized and are now preparing to receive the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and First Eucharist. This night, often called the Mother of All Vigils, is a powerful celebration of new life in Christ, as the unbaptized are welcomed into the Church through the full initiation of these sacraments.

It is important to distinguish between catechumens and candidates:

- Catechumens are those who have never been baptized and will receive all three sacraments of initiation at the Easter Vigil.
- Candidates are those who are already baptized, either in the Catholic Church or in another Christian tradition, and seek to be received into full communion with the Church through Confirmation and the Eucharist.
- Baptized Catholics who have not completed their sacraments (typically Confirmation) are not candidates for the Easter Vigil.

In the Archdiocese of Miami, baptized Catholics and candidates are not to be confirmed or received into full communion at the Easter Vigil. Instead, these sacraments are to be celebrated on other occasions, particularly during the Sundays of Easter, including Easter Sunday itself and Pentecost, once the necessary permissions have been obtained.

Delegation for Confirmation

For adult baptized Catholics (18 years or older) seeking Confirmation, pastors may request delegation from the Archbishop. Upon receiving this delegation, pastors may confirm baptized Catholics on any of the Sundays of Easter. This ensures that the sacrament is celebrated in the appropriate liturgical context, with the visible support of the parish community.

The distinction between catechumens and candidates highlights the significance of the Easter Vigil as a celebration of new birth in the faith. Just as the early Church welcomed converts through the waters of Baptism at the Easter Vigil, today's catechumens experience that same rebirth into the Body of Christ.

By celebrating the sacraments for baptized Catholics and candidates on the Sundays of Easter, we uphold the beauty of their renewal and commitment to their faith in a visible and meaningful way. The Easter season, rich with the joy of the Resurrection, provides a fitting time for these celebrations.

As we prepare to rejoice in the Resurrection, let us continue to accompany all those preparing to receive the sacraments. Whether through the waters of Baptism at the Vigil or the anointing of Confirmation on Easter Sunday, each step is a reminder of the grace and renewal we all share as members of Christ's Body. -RJV



Understanding Liturgical Practices: The Sign of the Cross after the Penitential Act

IN THE sacred rhythm of the Mass, each gesture and prayer carries profound significance, guiding the faithful deeper into the mystery of the Eucharist. One such gesture—the Sign of the Cross—is prominently made by all at the beginning of the Mass during the Introductory Rites. According to the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM), “All make the Sign of the Cross and the celebrant extends a greeting to the gathered people in words taken from Scripture.”

Following this, the Penitential Act invites the congregation to acknowledge their sins and seek God's mercy. This act culminates in the priest's prayer, “May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.” It's essential to recognize that this prayer, while penitential, does not constitute sacramental absolution as in the Sacrament of Penance. Therefore, the faithful are not directed to make the Sign of the Cross at this moment.

The inclination to cross oneself after the Penitential Act may stem from practices in the Extraordinary Form of the Mass (the Tridentine Mass), where certain gestures differ from those in the Ordinary Form. However, in the current liturgy, the Sign of the Cross is reserved for specific moments, such as the initial greeting, the proclamation of the Gospel (where the faithful trace small crosses on their forehead, lips, and heart), and the final blessing.

While personal devotions are valuable, it's important to distinguish them from communal liturgical practices to ensure that the collective worship experience remains consistent and faithful to the Church's guidelines.

In summary, while the Sign of the Cross is a powerful expression of faith, its use within the Mass is designated for particular moments. Refraining from crossing oneself after the Penitential Act aligns with the current liturgical norms and helps preserve the sacred structure of the Mass as intended by the Church. -RJV

Liturgical Vesture for Deacons: Clarity, Tradition, and Proper Usage



IN THE rich tradition of the Church, the role of the deacon is one of service at the altar, the proclamation of the Word, and works of charity. As an ordained minister, the deacon's liturgical role is visibly expressed through the proper use of sacred vestments. The Church, through her liturgical documents, provides clear guidance on the appropriate vesture for deacons in various liturgical settings, reinforcing the dignity of their role and the unity of the sacred rites.

Liturgical Vestments of the Deacon

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) states:

"In the vesting room, the sacred ministers put on the sacred vestments. The deacon should wear the alb, stole, and dalmatic, unless a dalmatic is not available. In that case, he may wear just the alb and stole" (GIRM 338).

This norm applies whenever the deacon assists at Mass. The dalmatic, while sometimes omitted for practical reasons, is the proper vestment of the deacon and should be worn whenever possible. The stole, worn diagonally from the left shoulder to the right side of the waist, is a visible sign of the deacon's ordination and sacred office.

At Eucharistic celebrations, the deacon's vestments distinguish his role from that of the priest. The Ceremonial of Bishops affirms this distinction:

"The sacred vestments worn by bishops, priests, and deacons at liturgical celebrations contribute to the beauty and dignity of the rite and signify the hierarchical order of the clergy" (CB 62).

Thus, the proper vesture is not optional but an essential part of the deacon's participation in the sacred liturgy.

Vesture Outside of Mass

The deacon is called to lead various liturgical celebrations outside of Mass, including funeral rites, prayer vigils, Stations of the Cross, and graveside services. The appropriate vesture depends on the nature of the rite being celebrated:

- Funeral Vigils and Prayer Services: The deacon should wear an alb and stole. The Order of Christian Funerals provides guidance:

"The minister who presides at the funeral rites wears the liturgical vestments appropriate to the rite being celebrated" (OCF 182).

- Graveside Services and Committals: The deacon should wear at least an alb and stole. This maintains the solemnity and dignity of the rite while clearly marking the minister's role.

- Baptisms, Stations of the Cross or Other Public Devotions: The deacon should wear an alb and stole when leading public prayer, reinforcing his role as an ordained minister. The use of a cope and deacon stole is encouraged when performing a baptism or leading the Stations of the Cross.

Clerical Attire for Deacons in the Archdiocese of Miami

While vesture during liturgical celebrations is prescribed by the Church's documents, it is equally important to clarify the expectations regarding clerical attire outside of liturgy. In the Archdiocese of Miami, the use of the clerical collar by permanent deacons is not permitted. This policy underscores the distinction between deacons and priests while maintaining the unique identity of the diaconate.

However, an exception is made when a deacon wears choir dress (cassock and surplice) for liturgical or ceremonial purposes; in such cases, a clerical collar may be worn as part of the traditional vestment. This form of vesture, while not used for the celebration of Mass, may be appropriate for occasions such as serving as an assistant master of ceremonies, wearing a cope, Benediction, certain liturgies of the Word, or when serving in a dignified liturgical role outside the context of the Eucharist.

This exception does not lessen the expectation that deacons wear the proper liturgical vestments when exercising their ministry. In fact, the fact that permanent deacons do not wear a clerical collar in everyday life makes it even more essential to vest appropriately during liturgical functions. The faithful must be able to recognize the deacon's sacred role within the liturgy, not by clerical attire, but by the visible sign of his alb, stole, and dalmatic.

Faithful adherence to these norms honors the liturgy, strengthens the witness of the diaconate, and ensures the dignity of the Church's sacred rites. -RJV

Liturgical Norms for Incensation, the Book of the Gospels, and the Role of Deacons



THE beauty and order of the Church's liturgy are upheld through clear rubrics and traditions that guide each minister's role in the celebration of the Mass. Proper liturgical actions, such as the use of incense, the handling of the Book of the Gospels, and the distribution of spoken roles among deacons, contribute to the solemnity and reverence of the sacred rites. Below, we address these important questions using references from the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM), the Ceremonial of Bishops (CB), and other authoritative liturgical texts.

Incensation: The Proper Number of Swings

1. The Blessed Sacrament at the Consecration or During Exposition and Benediction

The Ceremonial of Bishops (CB 92) and the GIRM (277) specify that three double swings of the thurible are used when incensing the Blessed Sacrament. This applies at the consecration during Mass and during Eucharistic Exposition and Benediction.

- The incensation occurs while kneeling when the Blessed Sacrament is exposed, showing the highest form of reverence.
- During Benediction, the priest or deacon incenses the Blessed Sacrament with three double swings while making the sign of the cross.

2. The Celebrant (Priest, Bishop, Cardinal, Pope) and Concelebrants

According to GIRM 277, the celebrant is incensed with three double swings. If a bishop is presiding, the deacon or assisting minister may bow before and after incensing him.

Concelebrants are incensed as a body with three double swings toward the central celebrant.

3. The Assembly of the Faithful

The GIRM specifies that the people are incensed with three double swings directed toward the congregation as a whole. The thurifer moves in three directions: center, left, and right. Individual members of the congregation are not incensed separately.

4. The Book of the Gospels

The GIRM 277 states that the Book of the Gospels is incensed with three double swings before its proclamation. This occurs after the deacon or priest announces, “A reading from the holy Gospel according to...” and before he begins reading.

The Procession of the Book of the Gospels

The Ceremonial of Bishops (CB 141-143) provides guidance on the handling of the Book of the Gospels during processions:

- It should be elevated as a sign of Christ’s presence in His Word.
- The deacon carries it face outward so the faithful can see it.
- If passing the tabernacle, the book should be reverently turned toward it as a sign of respect.

Proper Placement of the Book of the Gospels on the Altar

— Entrance Procession and Placement on the Altar

The GIRM 173 states that the Book of the Gospels is placed face up on the altar upon arrival.

- It is typically not placed on a stand at this point but laid directly on the altar in a dignified manner.
- The book remains on the altar until the Gospel procession.

Gospel Procession: Proper Handling and Movement

— Gospel Procession from the Altar to the Ambo

While the specific route may depend on the church’s architecture, some general best practices include:

- The deacon or priest elevates the Book of the Gospels high and processes slowly to the ambo without stopping.
- If a deacon is present, he proclaims the Gospel; if not, the priest does so.

If a Bishop is Present: Presentation of the Book of the Gospels for Veneration

When a bishop presides at the Mass, the Book of the Gospels is brought to him for veneration. The Ceremonial of Bishops (CB 141) specifies:

- The book should be open and facing outward when carried.
- The deacon approaches the bishop from the front, holds the book sideways, allowing the bishop to kiss it easily.
- If the book is placed on a stand or held by the deacon, the bishop may also trace a sign of the cross over it before veneration.

Liturgical Roles of Two Deacons at Mass

— Distribution of Liturgical Parts Between the Deacon of the Word and the Deacon of the Altar

When two deacons serve at the same Mass, their roles are clearly divided according to the GIRM and the Ceremonial of Bishops:

- The Deacon of the Word proclaims the Gospel, leads the General Intercessions, and may give instructions to the people.
- The Deacon of the Altar assists at the preparation of the gifts, holds the chalice during the Eucharistic Prayer, and assists with the purification of the vessels.
- Who announces the Sign of Peace? The invitation, “Let us offer each other the sign of peace,” is typically given by the Deacon of the Altar, as he is positioned closest to the celebrant at that point in the liturgy.

Liturgical discipline, particularly regarding the use of incense, the handling of the Book of the Gospels, and the role of deacons, ensures that the sacred liturgy is celebrated with beauty, clarity, and reverence. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal, the Ceremonial of Bishops, and other liturgical norms provide clear guidance on these matters.

By faithfully observing these traditions, deacons, priests, and all liturgical ministers uphold the dignity of the Church’s worship, ensuring that the faithful encounter the mystery of Christ in the most reverent manner possible. Let us strive always to celebrate the liturgy with precision, devotion, and love for the sacred. -RJV

