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## **A. INTRODUCTION**

The Easter Triduum (the “three days”) is the heart of our liturgical year and celebrates the heart of our faith, the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ: his life, passion, death, and resurrection. One long feast, it goes from sundown to sundown beginning with the Mass of the Lord’s Supper, through Good Friday, reaching its high point in the Easter Vigil, and closing with evening prayer of Easter Sunday. The Easter Vigil in the Holy Night is the preeminent liturgy of Easter, the entire rite of the night between Saturday and Sunday. Forty days of Lent prepare us for this Pasch. Fifty days unfold afterwards in celebration of it.

## **B. GENERAL CATECHESIS**

### **1. The Rite of Marriage**

The Paschal Triduum is not an appropriate time for the celebration of a wedding, and all the energy and resources of a parish community are focused on the Three Days. Be sure that couples who are planning a spring or Easter wedding know this well in advance.

### **2. The Rite of Funerals**

Funeral Masses are not permitted during the Paschal Triduum, though a funeral in the context of a Liturgy of the Word is possible. On Good Friday, such "funerals are to be celebrated without singing, music, or the tolling of bells" (PS, 61). For a funeral outside of Mass, see *The Order of Christian Funerals*, #179.

Families should be informed of these liturgical requirements with gentle sensitivity, and asked to postpone the funeral to the following Monday, if possible.

## **C. LITURGICAL CELEBRATIONS**

### **1. Holy Thursday: Mass of the Lord’s Supper**

#### **a) Introduction**

This Mass is held in the evening and is the threshold liturgy of the Triduum. The liturgical color is white. There should be a full complement of ministers. Priests concelebrate, deacons and lay ministers assist. Art and Environment ministers prepare what is needed for the processions, the décor of the worship space and the altar of repose, and the Washing of the Feet: the seating, pitchers, bowls, and towels prepared ahead of time and kept in full view as part of the environment for the night. Hospitality ministers welcome and greet, then assist in the various processions and movements of the liturgy. Servers assist the priest celebrant, and serve as thurifer for incense, candle-bearers, cross-bearer, and bell-ringers, and assist with the Washing of the Feet. Cantors, musicians, and choirs lead

the sung prayer of the assembly. An MC, a Master of Ceremonies is often helpful to guide the ritual flow of the entire celebration.

**b) Gloria**

After six silent Sundays, mark the brief return of the Glory to God by ringing the bells. Choir members and servers may do this indoors. An usher, greeter, or other volunteer could handle the tower bells if you have them. You may invite the parish community with an announcement in advance to bring all kinds of bells, or you may reserve this for the grander Easter Vigil Gloria.

**c) The *Mandatum* or Washing of the Feet**

The model of service instituted by Jesus is firmly rooted in the *mandatum*, the humble actions of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples. Jesus' words are quite strong "As I have done for you, so you should also do."

*Who may have their feet washed and should they only be 12 men? The USCCB responded to this question in 1987 and stated the following (which was reaffirmed in 2007):*

The Lord Jesus washed the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper as a sign of the new commandment that Christians should love one another: "Such as my love has been for you, so must your love be for each other. This is how all will know you for my disciples: by your love for one another" (see John 13, 34-35). For centuries the Church has imitated the Lord through the ritual enactment of the new commandment of Jesus Christ in the washing of feet on Holy Thursday.

Because the Gospel of the *mandatum* read on Holy Thursday also depicts Jesus as the "Teacher and Lord" who humbly serves his disciples by performing this extraordinary gesture which goes beyond the laws of hospitality, the element of humble service has accentuated the celebration of the foot washing rite in the United States over the last decade or more. In this regard, it has become customary in many places to invite both men and women to be participants in this rite in recognition of the service that should be given by all the faithful to the Church and to the world. **In the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, it is encouraged that a cross-section of the population participate in this ritual: women and men, young and old.**

This action of humility and service expresses the responsibilities of those who share the Eucharist. Resist suggestions to replace it with something else. Washing hands or even shining shoes are not viable alternatives! In biblical times it was prescribed that the host of a banquet was to provide water and a basin so that his guests could wash their hands before sitting down at table. Although a host might also provide water for travelers to wash their own feet before entering the house, the host himself would not wash the feet of his guests. According to the Talmud the washing of feet was forbidden to any Jew except those in slavery. Peter's defiant response

shows that Jesus' action was culturally shocking and challenging from the beginning. The sign expresses the profound drama of Jesus' action when the presider gives the example to others by falling to his knees to serve those in the community.

**d) Communion Rite and Transfer of the Sacrament**

Any remaining Precious Blood should be consumed. The rest of the Consecrated Hosts are brought to the altar and collected in one ciborium or vessel if possible. Be sure that it can be easily carried in procession with the humeral veil. This will be used for adoration tonight and for distribution of Holy Communion on Good Friday. The Precious Blood may not be reserved.

After a period of silence, the Prayer after Communion is sung or said. That prayer concludes the spoken texts of the liturgy. There is no greeting, no blessing, and no dismissal. The Paschal Triduum continues with adoration and concludes at midnight. The presider then puts incense in the thurible, kneels, and incenses the Blessed Sacrament on the altar three times. After receiving a white humeral veil, he picks up the vessel containing the body of Christ from the altar, covers it with the veil, and the procession begins. Cross, candles, and incense lead the priest with the Blessed Sacrament in procession through the church to the place of reposition. A simple gesture invites the assembly to follow behind the ministers. They, too, may carry candles. The *Roman Missal* suggests that *Pange Lingua* be sung during the procession, except for the last two stanzas (*Tantum Ergo*). The path of the procession need not be the shortest distance between two points. The place of reposition should be a chapel or place apart from the body of the church, preferably a place where all the people may gather. At the place of reposition, the presider sets the vessel down before the empty tabernacle or repository. He adds incense to the thurible, kneels, incenses the Blessed Sacrament, and all may sing *Tantum Ergo*. A monstrance is not to be used. The repository or tabernacle is then closed, perhaps by the deacon. The priest and the ministers spend some time in adoration, then stand and genuflect, and return to the sacristy. Adoration continues before the closed tabernacle, not before the exposed Eucharist. There is no dismissal of the faithful, and they need to be reminded to depart in silence and return in silence the next day. They may remain or go home and return as they wish.

The sanctuary and church are stripped bare in silence and without ceremony. Crosses should be removed or may be covered in red or purple cloth. Statues may be covered. Candles and vigil lights should be removed, as well as extraneous furniture such as credence tables, plant stands, etc. For Good Friday, the church must be completely barren and shockingly stark.

## 2. Good Friday: Passion of our Lord

### a) Introduction

The primary service of the day is the Passion of the Lord which should ordinarily take place at 3:00 PM. However, for serious pastoral reasons, it may take place at another more suitable time. In the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, it is permitted to begin in the evening when many more faithful can participate. The liturgical color is red. Devotions such as the Stations of the Cross have a place on this day, but they must never overshadow the celebration of the Lord's Passion as the primary liturgy of the day. Whatever you do, do not mix liturgy and devotions. **NOTE: MASS IS NOT TO BE CELEBRATED ON THIS DAY.**

### b) Introductory Rites

This celebration begins in silence. There is to be no entrance music or singing. *(In fact, it is recommended that the throughout this celebration, music be limited to the responsorial psalm, Gospel acclamation, and an optional communion song. The Roman Missal, third edition also suggests various chants during the Adoration of the Holy Cross.)* The ministers come in and prostrate themselves in front.

### c) Liturgy of the Word

The Passion according to John is proclaimed. Rehearse in advance with the microphones. If several readers are involved, let them practice movement and pacing, not just words. Have them come together, bow to the altar, and go to their stations before beginning the Passion. After the proclamation, they may come together and bow to the altar again before going to their places.

### d) Adoration of the Holy Cross

There are two forms for showing the cross. The first form envisions the procession of a veiled cross, flanked by candles, into the sanctuary. A deacon or another minister first goes to the sacristy with other ministers, from which he brings the violet-veiled cross in a procession. It is brought through the church to the middle of the sanctuary between two ministers with lit candles. There, three times the priest unveils part of the cross; sings, "Behold the wood of the cross, on which is hung the salvation of the world," raises it; and all kneel in silence.

The second form envisions the procession of the unveiled cross carried through the church by a priest or deacon. He stops near the door in the middle of the Church before entering the sanctuary, sings the acclamation. For veneration, make sure the cross is accessible to the elderly and those who use a wheelchair. In some churches, ministers may hold it, with members of the faithful taking their places. In other places it is placed on the ground or against a prop — but not against the altar or some other

religious object. Candles should be placed on its right and left without impeding access.

**e) Holy Communion**

The presider leads the community in the Lord's Prayer and the invitation to Communion. No sign of peace is given. Holy Communion is under one form for this communion service. This is not a celebration of the Eucharist.

After Communion, the remaining Blessed Sacrament is carried without ceremony (i.e., no candles) by an assisting minister to a suitable place outside the main worship space. This is a place of convenience, not a place for adoration. If necessary the tabernacle may be used, but this is not preferred. A period of silence is observed, and then the presider leads the Prayer after Communion.

The service concludes with the Prayer over the People. The presider does not introduce it with the greeting ("The Lord be with you"), but the deacon or he may say, "Bow down for the blessing." The priest then extends hands over the people and offers the prayer. No further dismissal is given.

**3. Holy Saturday: The Easter Vigil in the Holy Night**

**a) Introduction**

There is no Mass during the day and Holy Communion may be given before the Vigil only as Viaticum. Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick may be celebrated today. However, Lent

would have been a better time for Reconciliation, and if the anointing can reasonably be deferred a few days it can be celebrated in the glow of Easter, with newly blessed water to open the rite and Holy Communion to close it. Ministers to the Sick should make every effort to visit the sick during Good Friday and Holy Saturday, sharing with them some of the readings and bringing the prayers of the community.

The Easter Vigil Liturgy must take place at or around sundown. **In the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, it MUST NOT begin before 8:00 PM, unless specific permission is granted by the Bishop.**

**b) Part 1: The Blessing of the Fire and Preparation of the Candle**

A blazing fire may greet people as they arrive. *Paschale Solemnitatis* says this fire should be of some size, so that it actually dispels darkness and lights up the night (#82). It is best to prepare the fire outdoors. Put fire-building in the hands of people who know what they are doing. Officials generally respect religious customs, but be sure to consult with local fire marshals for whatever permissions might be required. Many municipalities have regulations about fires, even on private property. Be prepared with extinguishers in case the fire becomes too large, blankets to put out stray sparks, and hoses. Have a volunteer crew keep a careful eye on the blaze.

Have ready a new Paschal Candle of wax—large enough to evoke the truth that Christ is the light of the world (*Paschale Solemnitatis* 82). Artificial candles may not be used or second-use candles from previous years. Easter candles are available from a number of producers. During the Liturgy, the presider will carve these images into the wax during the preparation of the candle. In the *Roman Missal, third edition*, preparing the candle is no longer optional.

The Sign of the Cross opens the Vigil and then the presider greets the people. He then may improvise an introduction for the celebration. He blesses the fire, which has been burning before his arrival. Better have charcoal in there ahead of time, too, for the incense. The priest lights the paschal candle from the new fire. The candle is then marked and the five grains of incense inserted.

The deacon (or priest or cantor), from his place near the fire, raises the candle high, goes to the door of the church and intones the first "The Light of Christ," to which the assembly responds, "Thanks be to God." The thurifer bearing the censer leads the way. Then the priest lights his candle.

The deacon goes to the middle of the church, and sings the acclamation a second time. At this point, the fire of the paschal candle is spread to everyone else in the assembly. When the deacon reaches the foot of the altar, he holds the candle high once more and proclaims "The Light of Christ" a third time. The candle is then placed in its stand. The church lights may now be turned on.

The Exsultet announces the meaning of this night with an ancient chant, filled with poetry and beauty. A deacon, a cantor, a concelebrant, or the presider himself sings the text. A deacon receives the customary blessing from the priest as in before the

Gospel. The book and the candle are incensed at the beginning. All hold lit candles for this glorious event.

The *Roman Missal* says all extinguish their candles and sit at the conclusion of the Exsultet and before the readings begin. If the presider and ministers visibly blow out their candles after the proclamation without saying a word, the assembly may follow suit.

**c) Part 2: Liturgy of the Word**

*Paschale Solemnitatis* says that wherever possible, “all the readings should be read in order that the character of the Easter Vigil, which demands that it be somewhat prolonged, be reflected” (#85). “Only in the case of grave pastoral reasons can the number of readings be reduced. In such cases, at least three readings from the Old Testament should be read, always including Exodus 14” (USCCB, Committee on Divine Worship Newsletter, February 2010). It makes theological sense to read Genesis 1, Exodus 14, and one of the other prophetic readings.

**d) Part 3: Sacraments of Initiation**

See the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (218—43) for this service, unless you have no one to be baptized. In that case, refer to the *Roman Missal*. In the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* there are versions of the ritual order for the Reception of Baptized Christians (279— 498) and in the United States, for the combination of the Sacraments of Initiation and the Rite of Reception (566—94).

**4. Easter Sunday: The Resurrection of the Lord**

*Paschale Solemnitatis* encourages us to celebrate today's Mass with great solemnity, but it is not a shortened form of the Easter Vigil liturgy. Use incense in the opening procession, making sure to incense the paschal candle, the altar, and the crucifix. Use it to mark a grand Gospel procession, on the Book of the Gospels, during the Preparation of the Altar and Gifts, and finally, incense the priest celebrant and the assembly as well.

In the United States, the Creed is replaced with the Renewal of Baptismal Promises. After the Homily, the assembly is invited to affirm their belief as answers to questions, in a way similar to what was done at the Easter Vigil. The ritual gesture in response is the sprinkling of the people with Easter water from the font. Sprinkle the people as you did at the vigil, scooping the water from the font so that the association is clear. Sprinkle lavishly so that people feel the water of rebirth.

**D. BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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