

## *The Sacred Triduum*

This coming week we will enter the most sacred week of the Church's liturgical year: Holy Week. At the climax of this week, we will celebrate *the Sacred Triduum*, three days that form a single celebration: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil.

Most of us think of these days as three separate feasts. But nothing could be further from the truth. *The Sacred Triduum of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil forms a single feast whereby we participate in the Paschal Mystery.* This means that the ideal is to attend all three celebrations. Moreover, the ideal is to celebrate the Sacred Triduum in the same church with the same congregation rather than in different churches with different congregations.

The Sacred Triduum is the way in which we enter into the Paschal Mystery of Christ's death and resurrection. It is not a mere remembrance of the past; it is our participation in the ongoing mystery of Christ's saving death and life-giving resurrection. United with Christ, we die to the power of Sin over our life. United with Christ, we rise in the Spirit to his resurrection life.

**Holy Thursday, 7:00 PM.** The Sacred Triduum begins at sundown with the celebration of the Lord's Supper. On this day we participate in the Last Supper at which the Lord instituted the Eucharist as a perpetual memorial of his presence among us until he comes again. On this night the Church also recalls the institution of the priesthood. The Eucharist that we celebrate on this evening is distinctive in several ways. First, at the beginning of Mass, those who attended the Chrism Mass at the Cathedral bring forth the sacred oils we will use throughout the year for Baptism, Confirmation, and the Anointing of the Sick. Second, after the homily the priest washes the feet of twelve parishioners in imitation of what Jesus did to show that the meaning of ministry is service to others. Finally, at the end of Mass, there is a solemn procession of the Eucharist to the altar of repose where the Blessed Sacrament will be revered until 10:00 PM.

**Good Friday, 3:00 PM.** After the interruption of the night and morning, we resume the Paschal Triduum by a solemn commemoration of the Lord's death that consists of three parts: The Liturgy of the Word; the Veneration of the Cross; Holy Communion. The Liturgy of the Word consists of readings that focus on the Lord's death, a solemn reading of the Passion according to St. John, and an especially beautiful set of General Intercessions. The Veneration of the Cross allows us to venerate the symbol of our salvation. Although there is no Mass this day, we will receive Holy Communion from the hosts consecrated on Holy Thursday.

**Easter Vigil, 8:00 PM.** The climax of the Sacred Triduum is the Great Easter Vigil, the night during which we keep vigil as we await the Lord's resurrection. This beautiful evening consists of four parts: (1) The lighting of the New Fire and the solemn procession of the Paschal Candle into the dark church, showing how the risen Lord dispels the darkness of sin; (2) Readings from the Old and New Testament that foreshadow and proclaim the Lord's resurrection; (3) the blessing of the Easter Water and the renewal of our baptismal promises; and (4) the celebration of the Eucharist. On this night we keep solemn vigil with the entire church as we wait for the Lord's resurrection.

**Easter Sunday, 8:00, 9:30, 11:00 AM.** On this day, we rejoice with the church throughout the world that Christ has been raised from the dead. We do not merely remember a past event; we celebrate an enduring reality: The Lord is risen and alive in a way that we will not fully understand until we participate in his resurrection. In the meantime, we participate in the mystery of his death and resurrection by our participation in the Sacred Triduum.

*Father Matera*