

What is “Holy Week” and what should Christians do to properly recognize and participate in it?

Part 2 of 3

Fasting, Part Two: The Triduum Fast. With the arrival of Holy Thursday, the forty days of Lent and its discipline are over. Whatever a person’s special program was for Lent, whether it was to give something up, add extra prayers, do good deeds, or share alms, the program is done, but one must not relax too quickly. As soon as the forty-day Lenten fast ends, a new three-day fast begins, The Triduum Fast, a period of even more intense self-denial in immediate preparation for the greatest feast of all, Easter. It is customary to extend the Lenten discipline three additional days. Many decide to make one or more key additions such as a holy hour, a visit to church, an extended period of silence, no TV, and three days of fasting from physical food. It also involves a spiritual fast, Good Friday from the Mass, but with the reception of the Eucharist, and Holy Saturday, the deepest fast of all, when not only is there no Mass, it is the only day that the Church foregoes reception of the Eucharist.

Holy Thursday. The Easter Triduum begins with the evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper. The Mass recounts the establishment of the Jewish feast of Passover; and it commemorates the institution of the Eucharist, the institution of the priesthood, and the footwashing. John’s placement of the footwashing where the other evangelists place the Last Supper conveys his belief that the real presence of Christ is found not only in the Eucharist but in service. Jesus gave us his *mandatum* or mandate: “You ought to wash one another’s feet. I have given you an example. As I have done, so you should also do” (Jn 13:14,15). Jesus is made present when disciples put aside their prideful aspirations, humble themselves, and serve one another, even to the point of doing a menial task joyfully.

Symbols. The symbols of the footwashing are a basin, water pitcher, and towel; the symbols of the Eucharist are a host and a chalice, wheat and grapes, a loaf or basket of bread and a jug of wine, and five loaves and two fish; and the symbols of the priesthood are a stole, a book of the gospels, a host and a chalice, and a censer.

Discipleship Action Items. If your parish offers a Holy Hour before the Blessed Sacrament after Holy Thursday Mass, consider taking advantage of the opportunity. Offer a prayer that your priest might be devoted to the Eucharist and a humble servant. Be on the lookout for someone who might need assistance, and gladly help without drawing attention to yourself.

Good Friday. The celebration of the Lord’s Passion is a somber liturgy with three major parts: the proclamation of the Passion, the veneration of the Cross, and the reception of Holy Communion. In addition, there is an extended set of General Intercessions with ten petitions for some of the most important concerns for the Church and the world.

Symbols. The symbol of Good Friday is the crucifix, a cross with a *corpus* or body of the crucified Jesus. Other artistic forms of the cross are also commonly used. For the symbols of the Passion, see Passion Sunday above.

Discipleship Action Items. It is worthwhile to set aside some silent time, particularly between the hours of 12:00 noon and 3:00 p.m. Be sure that at least one crucifix is prominently displayed in the home, because veneration of the cross is not just for Good Friday, but for every day. It is an ideal day to offer Jesus a prayer of thanks for all he suffered on our behalf, and to renew our pledge to avoid the sins that we have committed that put him on the cross.