

The Wonder of Truth

The Celebration of the Passion of the Lord

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Celebratio Passionis Domini

The Liturgy of this day is marked with bold simplicity and austerity of sight and sound. In fact the church in accord with ancient tradition does not celebrate the sacraments at all except anointing of the sick and penance.

When you enter into the church it will be completely bare. The altar that was stripped the night before is completely bare: without a cross, without candles and without clothes. Why? The church is bare so the words of the Gospel tract resonate deeply:

Christus factus est pro nobis obædiens usque ad mortem autem crucis. Propter quod et Deus exaltavit illum: et dedit illi nomen quod est super omne nomen.

Christ became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every other name. – Phil 2:8-9

The church gathers at three o'clock. Why? This is the hour the Lord handed over his spirit and died.

The priest will approach the altar in silence and make a solemn prostration, and he prays, omitting the invitation "Let us Pray." Why? Once again the austerity and silence point out the bold simplicity with which we commemorate the



Passion of the Lord.

The priest according to the Roman Missal is to remove his shoes for the Adoration. Why? It reminds us that our adoration is a penitential procession during which we bring all our sins to the cross to proclaim the mercy of God incarnate in Jesus. In the early days of the Roman Church the Pope on Good Friday would walk barefoot through the streets of Rome from the Lateran to the church of the Holy Cross and there he would adore the cross.

We come and adore the Cross by a simple genuflection and another

sign of veneration such as a kiss. Why? Egeria narrates that in the fourth century in Jerusalem, the people would pass one by one and bow down and kiss the cross.

The celebration of the Lord's Passion is very simple and thus preparation is of utmost importance. The church invites us to sustain the Paschal Fast so may we be sparse in the food we take and restrained in the words we speak, and be so bold as not to even turn on the TV or radio or even be concerned about the news, because the world as we know it is passing away. Today let us lay aside all earthly cares and focus on Jesus. Consider praying the Office of Readings and the Morning Prayer of the church. Read the readings and prescribed chant of the Solemn Commemoration. All these efforts that require intention and perseverance ready us to adore the Cross of the Savior through whom we have forgiveness of sins through no merit of our own.

day.

The Solemn Celebration

The commemoration of the Passion of the Lord consists of three parts, namely, the Liturgy of the Word, the Adoration of the Cross and Holy Communion. The priest enters the church in silence and following ancient Roman practice makes a solemn prostration before the altar. Everyone kneels in silent prayer. The readings prescribed are Is. 52:13-53:12, Ps. 31:2,6,12-13,15-16,17,25; Heb. 4:14-16;5:7-9; and Jn. 18:1-19:42, and the Passion according to Saint John is proclaimed. The Lord addresses us in the proclamation of the Word and then we who have been transformed by that proclamation offer ten Solemn Intercessions.

The second part of the Liturgy is the Adoration of the Holy Cross. Once again Egeria, the fourth century pilgrim to Jerusalem is our first witness to this custom. The Deacon accompanied by the ministers with lighted candles goes to the front door of the church. The cross is veiled and is carried through the church to the altar. The priest uncovers a little of its upper part and elevates it while beginning the chant:

Ecce lignum Crucis, in quo salus mundi pepéndit.
Behold the wood of the Cross, on which hung the salvation of the world.

To which the people respond: *Venite adoremus.*

At the end of the singing . all kneel and for a brief moment adore in silence. The priest then uncovers the right arm of the cross and chants: *Ecce Lignum* and then finally uncovers the entire cross entirely and chants once again *Ecce Lignum.*

After the priest has venerated the cross, all follow in a procession to show reverence to the cross.

During the adoration, the Improperia are joined to the Trisagion, a practice that can be found as early as the ninth century. The Trisagion:

Holy is God, Holy and Strong, Holy and living forever!

has been chanted each Lenten Sunday before the Gospel and it culminates on this day. The church chants the Trisagion in Greek and Latin on this

Hagios o Theos, Sanctus Deus, Holy is God, Hagios Ischyros, Sanctus Fortis, Holy and Mighty, Hagios Athanatos, eleison himas. Sanctus immortalis, miserere nobis. Holy and Immortal One, have mercy on us.

Imbedded in the Missal are beautiful chants that express our faith so beautifully and merit contemplation. For example the *Crucem Tuam* inspired from the Byzantine tradition:

*Crucem tuam adoramus Domine,
resurrectionem tuam laudamus Domine.
Laudamus et glorificamus.
resurrectionem tuam laudamus Domine.*

We adore your Cross, O Lord,
we praise and glorify your holy Resurrection,
for behold, because of the wood of a tree
joy has come to the whole world.

then there is the beautiful *Crux Fidelis*. After the adoration is completed, the altar is prepared for the third part of the Liturgy, holy communion. This communion on Good Friday of our union with Our Lord in his glorious passion. So at the end of this solemn commemoration we bow our heads and the priest prays:

May abundant blessing, O Lord, we pray,
descend upon your people,
who have honored the Death of your Son
in the hope of their resurrection:
may pardon come,
comfort be given,
holy faith increase,
and everlasting redemption be made secure.
Through Christ our Lord.