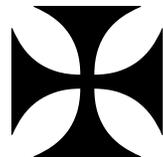


**HOLY WEEK**

**CEREMONY NOTES**

*BY*

**REV. MSGR. JAMES D. WATKINS**  
**PASTOR**  
**CHURCH OF SAINT ANN**  
**WASHINGTON, D.C.**



## PALM SUNDAY OF THE LORD'S PASSION

**Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion** (commonly known as "Palm Sunday"), the gateway to Holy Week, is first of all the great memorial of our Lord's solemn entrance into Jerusalem when he was about to suffer and to die. He did not fall a victim to man's hatred; rather, he went voluntarily to his death, with royal freedom. His death had been divinely decreed as the purchase for man's redemption. This festive entrance was his wedding march, as he proceeded to seal with blood his Bridegroom's love for us all.

Secondly, Palm Sunday is a feast in honor of Christ the King. It marks the first time during his earthly life that he allowed royal homage to be paid to him. In royal fashion he entered the "city of the great King." His kingship was the main reason why he was convicted and sentenced to die. He was, therefore, a martyr to his royal title. Throughout the world this day, the Church accords Jesus kingly homage. Into our hands the Church puts palms and olive branches, symbols of our loyalty to him and of our willingness to do him homage. Palm Sunday gives us an opportunity to profess our faith publicly in the King of kings.

Thirdly, Palm Sunday brings us face to face with suffering, for it introduces us to Christ's sacred passion, preparing us for his death on Calvary. We are to share our Master's burden, a task that becomes possible only if we ourselves are willing to become soldiers and martyrs.

The liturgy today, therefore, is quite dramatic. Christ is in our midst, and by our actions we proclaim ourselves his disciples. We accompany him from Mount Olivet (the blessing of palms) along the road from Olivet to the city gate of Jerusalem (the procession with palms), and finally into the Holy City itself (the Passion Narrative and the Sacrifice of the Mass).

In the actions and objects proper to today's liturgy, the Church displays a rich symbolism, one deserving special attention. The solemn entrance procession, for instance, is more than a mere memory, for in it we are actually accompanying Christ here and now. How is that true? Because Christ is present in three ways: first, in mere symbol, on the Cross which heads the procession; second, in his representative, the priest; third, in all of us as a community of baptized who are gathered in his name. We are the Church of this place here and now, and Christ, according to his promise, is in the midst of us.

This solemn procession with palms also looks to the future. Christ, in his redemptive work, passed from this world into heaven, which is called the New Jerusalem. If our Church stands for the earthly Jerusalem of old, it stands also for the New Jerusalem of heaven. When Christ comes again at the end of the world, he will lead our risen bodies, then joined to their souls, into heaven.

Moreover, as we enter now with Christ=s representative, the priest, we should think of the day when we hope to enter heaven itself with Christ our King. Our procession is a kind of “dress rehearsal,” if you will, in a symbolic way, of our final Passover on the Last Day.

The liturgy of Palm Sunday is so arranged as to bring together into sacred drama the rich historic and spiritual dimensions of our Lord=s entrance into Jerusalem and his passion and death. Essentially, three parts compose the liturgy:

- *Commemoration of the Lord’s Entrance into Jerusalem*

Dressed in red vestments, symbolizing the blood of Christ to be shed for us on a cross, the priest greets the people and blesses the palms, whose green color suggests the victory of life. The Gospel account of Jesus= historic entrance into the Holy City is proclaimed, and then the procession forms with the ministers, followed by groups of lay men and women who, like the children of that day (*pueri Hebræorum*), wave their branches in praise of their Messiah and King. Such movement of the faithful suggests the experience of our Lord. We, too, have been called to move forward, even towards the Paschal mystery of death and resurrection.

- *Liturgy of the Word*

Omitting the penitential rites, the celebrant invites all to pray. Then all are seated to hear the words of the Prophet Isaiah (50, 4-7) and the haunting sound of the sung Psalm 21, “*My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?*” The second reading from Saint Paul’s *Letter to the Philippians* (2, 6-11) emphasizes the victory of Christ=s death, culminating in the words, “*Jesus Christ is Lord!*”

There follows the reading of the Passion. With the rotation of this reading every year, one hears the same, yet slightly different, accounts of our Lord’s Passion and death:

Matthew 26: 14-27 (Cycle A) - Mark 14: 1-15 (Cycle B) - Luke 22: 14-23 (Cycle C)

- *Liturgy of the Eucharist*

The Mass continues, as usual, with focus on our Lord’s suffering and death which have destroyed sin and given us the hope of everlasting life. Through this perfect act of sacrifice, we have obtained God=s love and mercy. The Lord’s death gives us hope and strengthens our faith and, because of our faith in him who has conquered death with his own death, the promise of the resurrection is given to us.

*Composed by* REV. MSGR. JAMES D. WATKINS

*Church of St. Ann*

*Archdiocese of Washington*

## THE TRIDUUM

The last three days of Holy Week are referred to as the sacred **Triduum**. This period may be considered from a threefold viewpoint:

First, these days bring to a climax and a conclusion our preparation for Easter. The Church during Lent has been preparing in gradual intensity for these holiest of days.

Second, however, these three days are already a part of Easter, for there is an inseparable union between the death and resurrection of Christ. The two events constitute the Easter mystery. Therefore, we pass from Holy Week to Easter Week without any noticeable break. Holy Saturday is a resurrection and baptism service, that is, the Easter Vigil.

Third, these three days may, nevertheless, be regarded as a unit in themselves, a true triduum or trilogy, a three-part drama on Christ's redemptive work: 1) the Eucharist (Holy Thursday), the triumph of the Cross (Good Friday), and baptism and resurrection (the Easter Vigil).

## HOLY THURSDAY

The first of these days is **Holy Thursday**. *In cæna Domini*, or *At the Lord's Supper*, is the name by which this day is known in the Roman liturgy. The title, accordingly, points out the principal event commemorated, namely, the institution of the Holy Eucharist at the Last Supper.

In the Morning Prayer on this day, the agony on Mount Olivet is given prominence, but in this evening's liturgy the Last Supper occupies the central focus. Let us recall, therefore, its historical setting. In the forenoon, Jesus sent his two favorite apostles, Peter and John, from Bethany to the city to prepare the paschal lamb and the table for the supper. Late in the afternoon, Jesus left Bethany, said farewell to his mother, crossed Mount Olivet and joined the apostles in the upper room for the great Passover meal. After sunset, the events narrated in the Gospels occurred in the following order: 1) the paschal meal; 2) the washing of the feet; 3) the unmasking of the traitor; 4) the institution of his sacred Body and Blood in the Holy Eucharist and the Order of Priesthood which he bestows upon his apostles and their successors; and 5) Jesus' farewell discourse and his great priestly prayer.

The liturgy of Holy Thursday has a very special significance as the memorial of the Last Supper. There is something very touching and moving about this service. Tonight, if ever, we should take an active part in the great drama and not rest content as mere spectators. We should regard ourselves as disciples gathered about the Master in the upper room --- a Master who serves us, washes our feet, speaks to us, and feeds us with his very own Body and Blood, which come to us every day of our lives in the Eucharistic Sacrifice of the Mass by the power of the same priesthood which he entrusted to his apostles and to their successors for the very same purpose.

A double strain colors the Mass this evening: one joyous, the other heavy and sad. First, the joyous strain: the altar is adorned, the celebrant wears white vestments, and the *Gloria*, so long absent during Lent, is solemnly sung and the bells ring out (only to remain silent again until the Easter Vigil). There are only a few days in the Church's liturgical calendar which touch the heart so deeply, for after the *Gloria* is concluded, no bell is sounded --- a sign of mourning. Over this blessed celebration which is devoted to the institution of the sacraments of the Holy Eucharist and the ordained Priesthood of Jesus Christ, there likewise hangs a veil of deepest sorrow.

The Gospel (John 13, 1-5) describes the washing of the feet at the Last Supper. In an act of divine humility, Jesus showed how his commandment (hence, *mandatum*) of love must be fulfilled by serving others. While the feet of the twelve are being washed, a beautiful hymn (*Ubi Caritas*) on the love of neighbor is chanted:

*“Where there is love and fraternal unity,  
God is present.  
Let us rejoice and be glad in him.  
Let us fear the living God and love him.  
And with pure hearts be joined to one another...”*

Breathing the spirit of charity and peace, this song rises spontaneously from the hearts of God’s children, a family now most intimately united by the bonds of divine love. Abstracting from the external ritual, the spirit underlying the act must not be lost.

Both proofs of our Lord’s great love proper to this day, namely, the Holy Eucharist and the Foot Washing, come to mind. While it is impossible for us to imitate perfectly Christ in his gift of the Eucharist, we can imitate his example of humble service to others. Such service to others is the sign and expression of our union with him, for which the Eucharist and the Priesthood were established.

After Mass, the ciborium with this evening’s consecrated hosts (for tomorrow’s communion service) is taken in solemn procession to a side altar and reposed there. Observing this, the modern day Catholic reflects: the Bridegroom is taken away and the Church is deserted; however, Christians of former days thought differently, since a procession carrying the remaining Eucharist occurred after every Mass. Although the sacred host is not reserved on the main altar, the Church is never deserted, because Christ remains *present* in the altar and because the House of God remains the dwelling place of the most blessed Trinity.

After the ministers depart the church in silence, the altar is stripped and all other adornments are removed. In ancient times, it was the usual custom to uncover the altar after each Mass, for the altar was regarded as a table set for the sacred banquet, even as tables are covered and set for meals in any home. The altar is a symbol of Christ. From the earliest of times, the stripping of the altar was associated with the crucifixion. The Church stripped of adornment now appears desolate, nor will the holy Sacrifice of the Mass be offered again until the Lord has risen from the grave.

*Composed by* REV. MSGR. JAMES D. WATKINS

*Church of St. Ann*

*Archdiocese of Washington*

## GOOD FRIDAY

**Good Friday** is Christendom's great day of mourning. In ancient times, this day was "aliturghical," that is, no public services were held as a sign of mourning. The modern liturgy is in part borrowed from the Eastern Church (for example, the veneration of the Cross).

There are four easily recognizable divisions in this liturgy: 1) the Liturgy of the Word; 2) the solemn prayers; 3) the veneration of the Cross (from the liturgy of Jerusalem, where it was observed already in the fourth century; originally this preceded the scripture readings, but it was transferred to its present position in the late Middle Ages); and 4) the Communion Service.

In Rome today, the station church is the very ancient Basilica of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem (*Santa Croce in Gerusalemme*). In that Basilica, the great relic of the True Cross is preserved. For us, the spirit of today's liturgy takes place on Mount Calvary. We enter the church, and all is empty and bare; the tabernacle is open. All of this is an expression of silent, interior grief.

The mid-day liturgy begins in solemn silence. No candles are lighted, the altar is bare, and the usual adornments are removed. The priests enter, wearing the color red, symbolizing the blood of Christ to be shed on the cross. The celebrant prostrates himself at the altar steps, and all kneel in silence. Our humble prostration expresses our powerless and desolate state before redemption.

The service that follows is composed of four well-defined units, clearly indicated in the text:

### - *Liturgy of the Word*

The Good Friday liturgy every year presents the lessons from the Prophet Isaiah (52, 13 - 53, 12), which tell us of the suffering servant who bears the sins of his people. Then, Psalm 31 echoes the words of Jesus on the cross, "*Father, I put my life in your hands.*" The *Letter to the Hebrews* (4, 14 - 16; 5, 7-9) speaks of Jesus as the great High Priest whose suffering and self-sacrifice become the "*source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.*" Finally, there is the Passion Narrative according to Saint John (18, 1 - 19, 42), with the various parts of "Speaker," "Narrator," and "Jesus," and the people who reenact in symbolic fashion the trial and crucifixion of the Lord.

- *Solemn Intercessions*

Following the homily, the celebrant leads the faithful in a litany of solemn prayers for the universal Church:

- For the Pope
- For the Clergy and Laity of the Church
- For those preparing for Baptism
- For the Unity of Christians
- For the Jewish People
- For those who do not believe in Christ
- For those who do not believe in God
- For all in public office
- For those in special need

Before each of these prayers, all are invited by the deacon to kneel. Then, after a moment of silent prayer for the intention announced, the deacon invites all to stand. These ten orations and intercessions are particularly appropriate today, since Jesus, our King, is “exalted” and seeks to “draw all things to himself.” No salvation can come apart from the perfect sacrifice of Christ on the cross; therefore, the entire world is remembered in prayer, expressed through these solemn petitions.

- *Veneration of the Cross*

The drama of the Good Friday liturgy continues to unfold with the veneration of the holy Cross, the sign of our redemption. This rite is likewise very ancient. It originated in Jerusalem, where the authentic wood of the Cross was honored and kissed. Now, in solemn drama, the Church unveils the figure in three stages of Christ crucified. At the same time, in three ascending tones, the following chant is sung: “*Behold the wood fo the cross, on which hung the salvation of the world.*” All then respond, “*Come, let us adore,*” and kneel in adoration. The Cross is then taken and held by the servers, while the clergy and ministers kiss the foot of the Cross. The kiss is the sign of our contrition, our sympathy, and our love.

During the veneration of the Cross, the choir sings a number of heart-rending antiphons, the so-called Reproaches (*Improperia*). Jesus is reproaching his faithless people; with the gentle force of tearful complaints, he reminds them of the benefits he conferred during

the old dispensation and chides them for their ingratitude. His accusations are pointed toward us and should be accepted as exhortations to true conversion. Again and again we hear the refrain, *“My people, my people, what have I done against you, or in what have I offended you? Answer me.”* The Cross is then taken in solemn procession through the church, and all the faithful kneel in adoration. (Later, after the completion of the entire liturgy, the faithful are invited to come forward to make their private reverence of the Cross at the sanctuary gates.)

*- Holy Communion*

The final part of the liturgy is a Eucharistic service. Since the earliest times, the Sacrifice of the Mass has been omitted on Good Friday, but Christians remained unwilling to forego the reception of holy Communion. Therefore, at yesterday=s solemn Mass of the Lord’s Supper on Holy Thursday, a sufficient number of hosts were consecrated and reserved for their use today. The altar is covered with a cloth, and the corporal and ritual book are placed on it. Then the deacon brings the ciborium containing the blessed Sacrament from the chapel of reposition to the main altar, while all stand in silence. Two servers accompany the procession with lighted candles and place their candles on the altar. The celebrant introduces the Lord’s Prayer, as at Mass. Holy Communion is then distributed under the one sacred Species of Bread. There follows a Closing Prayer, and all depart in silence.

All parts of this liturgy present our Lord as Redeemer, yes, even a king upon the throne of the Cross: first, in the scripture readings and in the Passion Narrative; next, in the ten solemn intercessions; then, in the unveiling and adoration of the Cross; and finally, as the slain and yet transfigured Lamb of God in the Communion Service. Note the gradation here: the Redeemer’s death on the Cross is depicted first by words, then by action and symbol, and finally by Sacrament.

*Composed by* REV. MSGR. JAMES D. WATKINS

*Church of St. Ann*

*Archdiocese of Washington*

## THE EASTER VIGIL

The **Easter Vigil** is as sacred as the day of the Lord's rest. After creation, it has been called the "Second Sabbath." The day (Holy Saturday) is and should be the most calm and quiet day of the entire Church year, a day broken by no liturgical function. Our hearts overflow with joy, because this ideal way of keeping the vigil for Easter has again become possible for us. By a decree of February 8, 1951 Pope Pius XII restored the ancient Easter Vigil service and ordained anew the rites for its celebration.

### - *Service of Light*

It is during the night between Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday that the Easter Vigil is celebrated. The altar, stripped of all adornment since Holy Thursday, is now covered with linens, but candles and lamps are lighted only after the blessing of the fire. The fire is ignited. Vested in white, the celebrant greets all who now stand in the shadows of the natural fire. The symbol of light is the focus of this first part of the Easter Vigil liturgy. The celebrant prays over the fire, saying:

*"O God, who through your Son bestowed upon the faithful the fire of your glory, sanctify this new fire, we pray, and grant that, by these paschal celebrations, we may be so inflamed with heavenly desires, that with minds and hearts made pure we may attain festivities of unending splendor.  
Through Christ our Lord."*

A taper is lighted from the blessed fire, and now the celebrant proceeds with the blessing of the paschal Candle. The celebrant inscribes a number of symbols on the Candle to show that it is a sign of the risen Savior. With a stylus, he begins by tracing the Sign of the Cross. Across the vertical line, he says, "*Christ yesterday and today.*" Along the horizontal line, he says, "*The beginning and the end.*" Above and below the Candle he inscribes the Greek letters,  $\text{A}$  (*Alpha*) and  $\text{\Omega}$  (*Omega*). At the Candle's four cross angles, he inscribes the four numerals for the current year, saying, "*All time belongs to him, and all the ages, to him be glory and power, through every age for ever. Amen.*" The celebrant then inserts the five grains of incense into the Candle, signifying the glorified wounds of the risen Savior, saying, "*By his holy and glorious wounds, may Christ our Lord guard us and keep us. Amen.*" He lights the blessed Candle with a taper, saying, "*May the light of Christ, rising in glory, dispel the darkness of our hearts and minds.*"

A solemn procession with the paschal Candle now forms --- one of the most impressive ceremonies of the entire Vigil service. In the church's vestibule the deacon (Easter's herald, vested in white) takes the burning Candle. The procession begins. At three successive points, one hears the solemn chant, "*Light of Christ,*" to which all respond, "*Thanks be to God.*" Gradually, all the tapers of the ministers and faithful are lighted throughout the church.

The Easter Candle is then placed in the adorned paschal candle stand which occupies a prominent place in the sanctuary, visible to all. All stand in reverence before the burning Candle, a symbol of the life which will be spent by Christ for our salvation, as the deacon chants the glorious Easter Proclamation (*Exsultet*), the solemn hymn of praise, the first joyous acclamation of the risen Lord. After the singing of the *Exsultet*, the lighted tapers are extinguished, and all are seated.

- *Liturgy of the Word*

Now, in the presence of the burning Light which illumines the darkness of our hearts, all listen to the selected scripture readings from the Old Testament which speak of salvation history. Prayers accompany each of these readings, at which point all stand. After the last reading from the Old Testament, with its corresponding responsory and prayer, the solemn *Gloria* is sounded. The servers light the candles in the sanctuary, and the bells are rung. There follows a prayer and the Epistle from the Apostle, Paul. The solemn *Alleluia* is intoned and repeated by all. The deacon proclaims the Gospel. The glory of light and sound all convey the message of the victory of life over death and light over darkness.

- *Liturgy of Baptism*

After the homily, the community prepares to receive the catechumens and candidates into full communion with the Church. We invoke the saints to assist those who are about to be baptized and to help us as we prepare to renew our own baptismal promises. The celebrant blesses the water to be used in administering the Sacrament of Baptism. Those to be baptized (catechumens) come forward, renounce sin, profess the faith, and are individually baptized, clothed with the white garment, and presented with their baptismal candle. Then, the Catholic faithful renew their baptismal promises, and the celebrant sprinkles the assembly with the holy water. Next, the candidates (those who are conjoined to the Church through baptism, yet not fully incorporated) make their profession of faith in the Catholic Church. The celebrant then anoints the newly baptized and the received candidates with the sacred chrism, sealing them with the Sacrament of Confirmation.

(Later in the course of the liturgy, these adults will become fully incorporated in the Church of Jesus Christ through the reception of his Body and Blood in the Sacrament of Holy Eucharist. Thus, it is through the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist that a person is brought into full communion with Christ and his Church.)

There follows the General Intercessions in which we pray for the needs of the Church universal and particular.

- *Liturgy of the Eucharist*

The Liturgy of the Eucharist follows, as usual. Spiritual elevation to union with God through the power of Christ is what his holy night accomplishes, even though in this world we experience the very opposite in and around us. Of course, people will continue to sin, even after Easter, and the most perfect of Christians will, by nature, remain weak. Despite all that, we must believe firmly that now, at Easter, God enters the world and our souls to consecrate and to sanctify us. This is the most profound message the liturgy of holy Easter has to tell us. The solemn Eucharistic Sacrifice of the Mass concludes with the Easter *Alleluia*, chanted in three parts.

Saint John's words, "*The light which shines in the darkness,*" summarizes well the theme of the Christmas Season. So here, too, Saint John aptly captures Easter's triumph: "*The darkness grasped it not.*" In fact, darkness now continues its struggle against the Light as against an enemy. However, to those who receive the Light, Christ gives "*the power of becoming sons of God.*" At first, darkness engages the Light in a mighty struggle and inflicts upon it bloody defeat; but then, as the springtime sun, light rises in brilliance and triumph on Easter morning and attains "high noon," by analogy, at Pentecost, fifty days after his resurrection from the dead, with the sending of the Holy Spirit upon the Church. Never again will that Light fade; rather, its destiny is to transform us here on earth and thereby to prepare us to see the Light of Glory forever in heaven.

*Composed by* REV. MSGR. JAMES D. WATKINS

*Church of St. Ann*

*Archdiocese of Washington*