AN INTRODUCTION TO TENEBRAE

The traditional Roman Catholic Tenebrae (Latin meaning darkness) was a celebration, after dark on the evenings of Wednesday, Thursday and Friday of Holy Week, of a combination of the next day's Matins (composed of 3 nocturns each day) and Lauds, the first two hours of the Divine Office. The readings of each day's first nocturn were taken from the Book of Lamentations. Each day's office of Tenebrae contained 15 psalms, 9 readings, and one canticle, the Benedictus (Song of Zechariah). Lighting was gradually reduced throughout the service. Initially 15 candles were lit and placed on a special stand known as a hearse, which were extinguished one by one after each psalm. The last candle was hidden beneath the altar, ending the service in total darkness. In some places the use of a strepitus (Latin for ‘great noise’) was included as part of the service. The great noise was usually generated by slamming a book closed, banging a hymnal or breviary against the pew, or stomping on the floor, symbolizing the earthquake that followed Christ's death. This custom seems to have originated as a simple signal to depart in silence. Following the great noise a single candle, which had been hidden from view, was returned to the top of the hearse, signifying the return of Christ to the world with the Resurrection.

The lessons of the second nocturn were taken from the writings of St. Augustine and St. Leo the Great, and the lessons of the third nocturn from the epistles of Paul the Apostle. These have been neglected by composers and are not provided with a special lesson tone in the Liber Usualis.

The office of Tenebrae was universal within the Roman Rite until the reforms of the Holy Week ceremonies by Pope Pius XII, which he introduced experimentally in the first half of the 1950s and made obligatory in 1955. He ended the practice of celebrating the Easter Vigil, and so the resurrection of Christ, on Saturday morning and moved the Holy Thursday Mass and Good Friday services to the evening or the afternoon. The solemn evening celebration of the next day's Matins and Lauds were thus ended.

Although it is thus no longer part of the official Holy Week rites of the Roman Catholic Church, except for Wednesday evening in cathedrals where the Chrism Mass is celebrated on Thursday morning, Tenebrae, or a similar service in English, is celebrated in some individual Roman Catholic churches. In fact an adaptation of the Tenebrae service is becoming a popular commencement of the Holy Week liturgies in many Catholic parishes.

- From the Catholic Encyclopedia

Please stand for the opening hymn.
Opening Hymn

O Sacred Head, surrounded 
by crown of piercing thorn! 
O bleeding Head, so wounded, reviled and put to scorn! 
Our sins have marred the glory of Thy most Holy Face, 
yet angel hosts adore Thee 
and tremble as they gaze 

In this Thy bitter passion, 
Good Shepherd, think of me 
with Thy most sweet compassion, unworthy though I be: 
beneath Thy cross abiding 
for ever would I rest, 
in Thy dear love confiding, 
and with Thy presence blest. 

Please be seated for the rest of the liturgy.

1) **Incipit Lamentatio Jeremiah Prophetae** (Chanted in Latin)

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At the cross her station keeping 
Stood the mournful mother weeping 
Close to Jesus to the last.

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2) A Reading from the Lamentations of the Prophet Jeremiah

Through her heart, his sorrow sharing
All his bitter anguish bearing
Now at length the sword has passed.

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3) A Reading from St. Leo the Great on the Holy Passion of Christ

Please join the choir in singing the psalms.
Each syllable in bold indicates the musical movement.

Psalm 68

God will arise for battle; the enemy will be scattered;
those who hate God will flee.
The wind will disperse them like smoke;
as wax is melted by fire, so the wicked will perish before God.

Then the just will be glad; they will rejoice before God;
they will celebrate with great joy.
Sing to God, praise the divine name; exalt the rider of the clouds. Re-
joice before this God whose name is the LORD.

Father of the fatherless, defender of widows;
this is the God whose abode is holy,
Who gives a home to the forsaken,
who leads prisoners out to prosperity, while rebels live in the desert.

God, when you went forth before your people,
when you marched through the desert, Selah
The earth quaked, the heavens shook, before God, the One of Sinai, be-
fore God, the God of Israel.

You claimed a land as your own, O God;
your people settled there.
There you poured abundant rains, O God,
graciously given to the poor in their need.
The Lord announced the **news** of victory:
The kings and their armies are in desperate flight.
All you people so numerous, will you stay **by** the sheepfolds? Every household will share **the** booty.

4) A Reading from the Lamentations of the Prophet Jeremiah

   **Oh how sad and sore distressed**
   **Was that mother highly blest**
   **Of the sole begotten One.**

5) A Reading from St. Leo the Great on the Holy Passion of Christ

   **Psalm 71**

   In you, LORD, I take refuge;
   let me never be put **to** shame.
   In your justice rescue **and** deliver me;
   listen to me and **save** me!

   Be my rock and refuge, my **secure** stronghold;
   for you are my rock **and** fortress.
   My God, rescue me from the power **of** the wicked,
   from the clutches of **the** violent

   You are my hope, Lord; my trust, GOD, **from** my youth.
   On you I depend **since** birth;
   from my mother’s womb you **are** my strength;
   my hope in you **never** wavers.
I have become a portent to many,
but you are my strong refuge!
My mouth shall be filled with your praise,
shall sing your glory every day.

Do not cast me aside in my old age;
as my strength fails, do not forsake me.
For my enemies speak against me;
they watch and plot against me.

God, do not stand far from me;
my God, hasten to help me.
Bring to a shameful end those who attack me;
Cover with contempt and scorn those who seek my ruin.

I will always hope in you and add to all your praise.
My mouth shall proclaim your just deeds,
day after day your acts of deliverance,
though I cannot number them all.

I will speak of the mighty works of the Lord;
O GOD, I will tell of your singular justice.
God, you have taught me from my youth;
to this day I proclaim your wondrous deeds.

Now that I am old and gray,
do not forsake me, God,
That I may proclaim your might to all generations yet to come,
Your power and justice, God, to the highest heaven.

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6) A Reading from the Lamentations of the Prophet Jeremiah
Christ above in torment hangs
She beneath beholds the pangs
Of her dying glorious Son

7) A Reading from St. Leo the Great on the Holy Passion of Christ

Psalm 51

Have mercy on me, God, in your goodness;
in your abundant compassion blot out my offense.
Wash away all my guilt; from my sin cleanse me.
For I know my offense; my sin is always before me.

Against you alone have I sinned;
I have done such evil in your sight
That you are just in your sentence,
blameless when you condemn.

True, I was born guilty, a sinner,
even as my mother conceived me.
Still, you insist on sincerity of heart;
in my inmost being teach me wisdom.

Cleanse me with hyssop, that I may be pure;
wash me, make me whiter than snow.
Let me hear sounds of joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
Turn away your face from my sins; blot out all my guilt. 
A clean heart create for me, God; renew in me a steadfast spirit.

Do not drive me from your presence, nor take from me your holy spirit. 
Restore my joy in your salvation; sustain in me a willing spirit.

I will teach the wicked your ways, 
that sinners may return to you. 
Rescue me from death, God, my saving God, 
that my tongue may praise your healing power.

Lord, open my lips; 
my mouth will proclaim your praise. 
For you do not desire sacrifice; a burnt offering you would not accept.

My sacrifice, God, is a broken spirit; 
God, do not spurn a broken, humbled heart. 
Make Zion prosper in your good pleasure; rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

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8) A Reading from the First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians

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Is there one who would not weep 
Whelmed in miseries so deep 
Christ's dear mother to behold.

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Lamentatio Jeremiah Prophetae (Chanted in Latin)

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★ STREPITUS ★

At the end of the Liturgy all depart in Silence.