

Living the Spirit Holy Week

The Catholic Church has for time immemorial celebrated liturgically the events of the last days of the ministry or mission of Jesus. These days encompass the mystery of our salvation. They provide believers with many different and useful themes for their spiritual growth. The very days are considered sacred or holy. This is because they are the time when we are called to be or become holy. Holiness always requires sacrifice. Thus it was with the work of Jesus in saving us. We should not be surprised to find ourselves called to make a sacrifice in these days. Perhaps it is only the sacrifice of our time. It should also be a time for our fasting and abstinence, so that nothing displaces the central presence of Jesus in our thoughts and actions.

In the liturgies the whole Church prays intensely that the graces earned by Jesus for His people – the whole of humanity – might be given generously to us. Our participation in those liturgies as well as in traditional devotions helps us appreciate the value of our prayers for the salvation of our world. We are aided by the richness of the images presented to us, the sounds of (traditional) music, the atmosphere of the place of worship.

I can recall the liturgies before the revisions made after Vatican II. They required a great amount of preparation. The rubrics (the directions for the rites) were complex and often singular or unique to one aspect of the celebration. In my early days my appreciation was probably more on the devotions than on the formal liturgies. After all, Mass was in the morning, and school was in session. Yet I still have the memory of much that I loved. We would go to three churches on Holy Thursday afternoon or evening, and visit the Lord in the Repository. The altars were lavishly decorated in a sign of our joyous love for the Eucharist. And anyone going into the church on Good Friday would feel how cold the church seemed, since Jesus was not in the tabernacle.

The Church in the wisdom of the times has made changes in the liturgy to accommodate the changes in the way people live. Pope Pius XII was the first to make some important changes. And you will be familiar with them, since they have taken hold as the normal way of celebrating these days.

Let me now recall some other memories of the days of this week. Palm Sunday meant going to church for a piece of palm. That was always placed behind the crucifix in my home. Palm Sunday was almost joyful with its emphasis on the triumphal procession of Jesus into Jerusalem. Our song was filled with Hosannas. As an aside I may add that often Palm Sunday meant wearing my new suit. If not then, then on Easter.

The weekdays following Sunday's atmosphere was changed. Sometimes there would be reflection on the Apostles. We thought of Judas conspiring and planning with the enemies of Christ. Most families ate simple meals this whole week until Holy Saturday ended the feast. It was only as a priest that I became really aware of many of the ethnic customs which center on the foods to be eaten at Easter.

Holy Thursday always meant a procession through the church. We had to learn to sing the Latin *Pange lingua*. Banners with holy images were carried, usually by the eighth grade boys. Of course, the girls carried the tune and made the music as beautiful as it could be. Three priests were active in the liturgical rite. Most people received Holy Communion. Then visits continued after the morning Mass as I mentioned above.

Good Friday is and has been a time for solemn penance. Believe me it was a penance to be quiet for the three hours from Noon to 3P.M. One really did fast and when old enough I joined in the *Three Hours Agony* devotion at church. The priests of the parish preached long sermons, and we said many prayers in between. The liturgy today begins at three o'clock. In my early days it began in the early morning. Only the priest received Communion in the Mass of the Presanctified. We would always go to the Stations of the Cross. Many came to love them as a prayer most suited to their desire to share in the Passion of Christ.

Holy Saturday brought an end to Lent. In my earliest days this was at Noon. Every child looked forward to eating candy, even if it was not yet Easter. The liturgies of Holy Saturday took time to understand. Perhaps that took place for me as a seminarian. We went to the Cathedral early in the morning and entered with the priest already celebrating the rites. Water was blessed and there were many readings, all in Latin. Today's Holy Saturday liturgy reflects something of the past. I must let it to you to make of that liturgy what you will. I hope that the Holy Spirit will inspire you to participate, if your schedule allows.

I have reflected on many personal themes, and it is my hope that reading my memories will inspire you to think of what Holy Week has meant to you, and should still mean to you. Often in Lent the Church uses the response: *If today you hear His voice, harden not your hearts*. Does the Spirit say this to you as you approach this holiest week? Do you want to share abundantly in the graces Jesus won for all of humanity? Then this is the time. With Easter this week is the time for salvation. If every believer prayed with Jesus, perhaps many of the evils in our world would be overcome.

Let me take this insert as a time to ask you to evaluate the usefulness of reading these inserts. As I grow older I must use lessening gifts of inspiration to write them, or even revise earlier ones. I also would like to mention that some inserts are already on the parish website. I am no expert as instructing you how to find them. The website address is found on the top of the bulletin. My writings are found by going to the home page of OLPH Church (Bethlehem, of course)

Finally, let us pray simple prayers this week. At the Eucharist: ***My Lord and my God! Jesus I trust in you.*** On Good Friday: ***We adore you, O Christ, and praise you, because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.*** Pray: "Jesus". Do it for those who defile his name.

God love you with His abundant love!
Monsignor Morrison