

Holy Week Explained

The richness of our Catholic Easter traditions can leave many parents feeling overwhelmed...



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Feature Article

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This Month...



- We 2 St Francis of Paola
- Su 6 **Lent 5**
Lazarus Lives!
- Fr 11 St Stanislaus
- Su 13 **Passion Sunday**
Hosanna in the Highest!
- Th 17 **Holy Thursday**
- Fr 18 **Good Friday**
- Sa 19 **Holy Saturday**
- Su 20 **Easter Sunday**
Alleluia!
- We 23 St George
- Fr 25 ANZAC DAY
St Mark
- Su 27 **Easter 2**
My Lord and my God!
- Tu 29 St Catherine of Siena

It's a wonderful season packed to the brim with meaningful ceremonies that bring us to reflect on the mystery of God's love. Yet we truck from ceremony to ceremony to family lunches and then wrangle over-sugared and overtired children into bed with an exhausted sigh of relief... Is it any wonder that the reverence and wonder of the week is often lost?



Easter can also make us uncomfortable for another reason. In a feel-good culture we don't like to acknowledge our sinfulness. We'd rather believe that our weaknesses are acceptable. But this is the whole point of Christianity. Regardless of how small, our sins are the reason Easter happened. Every. Single. Little. One.

Easter is the time after 40 days, (hopefully) of a new spiritual discipline, to evaluate and meditate on our own imperfections and stand in awe of the radical love of God who died to set us free. It's an awe-inspiring mystery.

Surviving Easter with Kids

The services at this time of year are rich in meaning and complex in theology. It can be overwhelming for adults, let alone for young children. You can help them get the most out of the church services by using some of these ideas to explore the themes.



**Triumphant entry into Jerusalem
(Matthew 21)**

A large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,

*‘Hosanna to the Son of David!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!’*



PALM SUNDAY

What's it all about?

The Service is longer on this Sunday. We begin by reading the recount of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on a donkey. Palms are blessed with holy water. Usually, this part of the service takes place outside the church, but if not practical, can take place inside before Mass begins.

The Gospel reading is rather long and recounts the whole passion story, which is why this day is also known as "Passion Sunday". The day marks the beginning of Holy Week.

Palm Sunday has a bitter-sweet tone. On the one hand the story is upbeat with the crowd joyfully proclaiming Christ as the long promised Messiah, yet by the end of the week, he is brutally executed.



Key Theme

There is a lot happening so focus on the **Triumphant Entry**. Key symbols are palms, olive branches and the colour red.

Ways to Celebrate

1. **Make things with palms** – such as the palm cross (St Brigid, regular), palm wreath for the front door, palm floral arrangement.
2. If you **can't get real palms**, try making them with green paper handprints.
3. **Make a banner** or a flag banner “Hosanna!”
4. **Puppet story** – use toys like Lego to retell the story. You could even make a stop-motion movie.
5. **Go for a donkey ride** (maybe Dad can be the donkey!)



Jesus Washes the Disciple's Feet (John 13)

He got up from the table, removed his outer garment and, taking a towel, wrapped it round his waist; he then poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciple's feet and to wipe them with the towel he was wearing...

When he had washed their feet and put on his clothes again he went back to the table. 'Do you understand,' he asked, 'what I have done to you? You call me Master and Lord, and rightly; so I am. If I, then, the Lord and master have washed your feet, you should wash each other's feet.'



What's it all about?

There are two Masses on this day.

1. In the morning is the **Chrism Mass** where the holy oils are blessed by the Bishop with as many priests as available for use during the coming year.
2. In the evening is the **Mass of the Lord's Supper**. This includes the washing of the feet. The Mass is concluded by stripping the sanctuary of all decoration (flowers, altar cloth, banners etc) and by the transfer of the Eucharist from the tabernacle to the Altar of Repose, usually a side altar or chapel. The congregation is encouraged to 'keep watch' with Christ, as Jesus asked the disciples to keep watch while he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane (known as the Agony in the Garden).

HOLY THURSDAY

Key Theme

Again, there are many different aspects to this ceremony so choose one of the following on which to focus and then select an appropriate activity:

- **Servant leadership:** washing of feet (#3)
- **Institution of the Eucharist:** the Mass (#1)
- **Passover:** Jewish roots, Christ as the paschal sacrifice (#1, 2)
- **Agony in the Garden:** keeping vigil with Jesus (#4,5,6)

Ways to Celebrate

1. **Last Supper Meal** – a handout for families to prepare a meal that reflects on the Jewish roots of the Mass.
2. Make **unleavened bread**.
3. **Wash each other's feet.** [Read the scripture story. Get a basin, a jug of water and a towel. Starting with the eldest, that person washes the feet of the person next to him/her. Then that person washes the next person's feet until it gets back to the first person.]
4. Spend some time praying at the **Altar of Repose**.
5. Set up a **garden prayer space** with candles, crucifix and other symbols of the passion (eg crown of thorns, rope, wooden cross etc). Pray the Sorrowful Mysteries (Rosary) and/or sing together the Taize song: 'Stay with Me' or just sit in silence.
6. Go on an **electronic media fast** from Thursday evening through to sunset on Friday.

GOOD FRIDAY



The Death of Jesus (Luke 22)

It was now about the sixth hour and, with the sun eclipsed, a darkness came over the land until the ninth hour. The veil of the temple was torn right down the middle; and when Jesus had cried out in a loud voice, he said, 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.' With these words he breathed his last.

What's it all about?

There are two ceremonies on this day, the Stations (or Way) of the Cross, usually at 10am and the Celebration of the Lord's Passion at 3pm.

Stations: There are a variety of traditions for encountering the Stations of the Cross and there are two approved versions. Most churches have the tradition 14 stations on the walls of the church which date back to St Francis of Assisi. Pope John Paul II instigated the Scriptural Way of the Cross which includes the Agony in the Garden and an optional 15th one for the Resurrection.

Celebration of the Lord's Passion: This is not a Mass but is a communion service with the veneration of the Cross where the people are invited to kiss the feet of Jesus on a crucifix or show some other sign of reverence. The readings again recount the passion of Jesus and there is a sombre mood. The service takes place at 3pm as it is understood that this is the time at which Jesus died.



Key Theme

Both services help us to focus on the suffering and death of Jesus which he undertook out of love for each one of us personally.

- **Repentance for our sins.** Often, the Sacrament of Penance (Reconciliation) is also available on this day.
- **Sacrificial Love.** Cross, crucifix, nails, blood, eclipse, earth tremors, darkness, colour red.

Ways to Celebrate

1. **Children's Stations of the Cross** – this is a drawing activity that helps children reflect on each station.
2. **Family Stations of the Cross** – Beginning with 14 lit candles, blow out a candle for each station to symbolise going from light to the darkness of the tomb.
3. **Make a cross** (sticks with twine or nails with wire). Reflect on how each person's cross is unique and special. In the same way, Jesus died for each of us.
4. **Get each person to think about their sin.** Write it down on paper and nail it to a wooden cross You could do this before or after going to Reconciliation.

Deliverance from Sin and Death (Romans 6)

We were baptised in Christ Jesus...

We went into the tomb with him and joined him in death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glory, we too might live a new life....

Christ, as we know, having been raised from the dead will never die again. Death has no power over him any more... He died, once and for all, to sin, so his life is now life with God... you too must consider yourselves to be dead to sin but alive for God in Jesus Christ.



What's it all about?

The vigil Mass on Holy Saturday is the peak service of the Church calendar and has four parts:

- 1. Service of Light** – the church is in darkness, the people gather around a large fire from which the new Paschal candle is lit. The light is then spread from person to person until all have a lit candle.
- 2. Liturgy of the Word** – there are nine readings on this night though some services will use less. They begin with the Creation and retell the story of redemption. Many churches will employ audio visual aids for some of these readings.
- 3. Liturgy of Baptism and Confirmation** – this is when new members to the Church are baptised and confirmed.
- 4. Liturgy of the Eucharist** – the newly baptised members present the bread and wine in the offertory and make their first communion.





Key Theme

Triumph of good over evil. Symbols include light, fire, white, praise songs.

Ways to Celebrate

1. Make a family **Paschal Candle**.
2. Have a **bonfire/campfire**. Tell stories of faith while roasting marshmallows.
3. Have a **dinner by candlelight**.
4. **Redecorate** the family prayer space with white or gold.
5. **Drape** a cross with a white sash or ribbon.
6. **Watch a movie** recounting the Life of Jesus. (Parents should use discretion on the appropriateness for your children).

The Empty Tomb (John 20)

It was very early on the first day of the week when Mary of Magdala came to the tomb. She saw that the stone had been moved away from the tomb and came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple... 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb' she said 'and we don't know where they have put him.'

So Peter set out with the other disciple to go to the tomb... Simon Peter... saw the linen cloths on the ground. The other disciple... saw and believed. Till this moment they had failed to understand... that he must rise from the dead.



EASTER SUNDAY

What's it all about?

Mass on this Sunday is all about the Resurrection of Jesus. It is because Jesus rose from the dead on a Sunday that Christians call Sunday, "The Day of the Lord" and is the day of the week dedicated to worship. This differentiates Christian tradition from the Jewish Sabbath which occurs on Saturday.

'Alleluia', which has not been used in any of the Church services during Lent reappears as a victory cry.

Key Theme

Victory over death and sin. Symbols include, sunrise, empty tomb, eggs (rebirth), butterflies (transformation) and the colour white and gold.



Ways to Celebrate

1. **Resurrection Party** – don't forget to invite Jesus! Transform your regular family lunch into a Christ focussed celebration.
2. **Get up early** to watch the sunrise and read the story of the women going to the tomb.
3. **Sidewalk evangelist** – use chalk to decorate your sidewalk with victory messages “Alleluia!”, “Jesus has Risen!” “Christ Lives!”
4. **Ever wonder** where the idea of a chocolate egg-laying rabbit came from?
5. **Easter egg hunt** – make sure you have a special ‘Alleluia’ egg – the person who finds this one must yell “Alleluia” three times. (P.S. make sure you use fair trade chocolates)
6. **Stations of Glory** - follow the disciples after the resurrection.

One Flesh Union

Byron & Francine Pirola

It can be hard to get our heads around the amazing gift that Jesus made of himself by dying on the cross for our salvation. We are told that it was a personal sacrifice, that if we were the only one in need, he would have still gone through with it – his love for each of us is so boundless, so individual that it is as if his suffering was for us alone.



Wow! It's truly overwhelming. Fortunately, God gives us a way to understand this extraordinary reality, at least a little, through the passionate, self-giving love of a couple. We know that many couples love with such intensity and commitment that they would willingly give their life for their beloved. This is more than just a nice thought – it's actually the basis of the Sacrament of Matrimony; that the love of the couple illuminates and mirrors the love that Jesus has for his bride, the People of God.

In his letter to the Ephesians, St Paul writes,

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church.” (Eph 5:31-32).

By these words he indicates that the one flesh union of husband and wife is the pivotal point in understanding how Christ loves the Church.





Where does Christ become 'one flesh' with his bride? In the Eucharist.

Literally, Jesus gives us his body, which we, as his bride, take into our body, giving ourselves back to him in deeper commitment and love. He sheds his blood by laying down his life for us, that we might have eternal life with him. It is a life-giving union.

In the same way, a husband gives his body to, and lays down his life for his bride, who receives his body into her own body, responding with her own gift of self – totally surrendered to his perfect self-donation. It also is a life-giving union, most especially if the couple also conceive a child.

In other words, the one-flesh union of husband wife, their total, reciprocal self-donation, illuminates the passionate love that Jesus has for each of us, his beloved bride. He gives himself totally to each of us and invites us to reciprocate – to give ourselves back to him in unreserved surrender to his love.

It was no mistake that the Eucharist was instituted on the eve of Jesus' passion and death. The Eucharist is for us, a permanent, concrete reminder of his total self-donation, the point at which he 'marries' us in an eternal commitment.

St Paul is absolutely correct It is a great mystery and Easter is the perfect time to meditate on it!

REFLECT

1. What things (sins) in your life, block you from fully receiving Jesus into your life?
2. How does this understanding of the purpose and meaning of sexual union impact you?
3. In light of this meditation, how might Jesus be asking you to grow in your marriage?

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