

The Final Stretch

by Fr. Mark Pavlik
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Our Lenten journey is drawing to a close and the Church is getting set for the great celebration of Easter. The week which is called “Holy Week” is meant to be just that – a holy time. We are in the final stretch and Easter is just days away. Beginning with Palm Sunday, the liturgies of Holy Week are wonderful opportunities to enter more fully into prayer and meditation on the Lord’s passion, death and resurrection.

Beginning on Holy Thursday, the Church begins the three-day celebration of the Triduum. Thursday celebrates the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. It is also known as Maundy Thursday, which comes from the Latin *mandatum*, meaning mandate, since at the Last Supper, Jesus gave his apostles the mandate, “I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.” It is a powerful reminder to each of us that we are called to live out the Gospel in our daily lives and imitate Jesus’ love.

The celebration of the Lord’s Passion is among the most moving liturgies of the whole year. The simplicity and quiet of this day is marked with the powerful retelling of the events of our Lord’s passion and death. It is a day marked with extraordinary intensity and no matter how many times one attends, you cannot help being moved and brought to a greater understanding of the price Jesus paid for our sins.

The starkness of Good Friday gives way to the celebration of the Easter Vigil. It begins in darkness with the blessing of fire and celebration of Christ as the “light that no darkness can overcome.” Readings from the Old Testament give an abbreviated synopsis of salvation history, from the covenant that God made with Abraham, to Moses and the Israelites being led to freedom from Pharaoh. There are the words of the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel and St. Paul’s epistle to the Romans. At last there is the proclamation of the Easter Alleluia and the Gospel account of the empty tomb.

The Easter Vigil, a celebration of light and renewal and most importantly of resurrection, also celebrates the sacrament of baptism and confirmation for those who have been preparing in our parish RCIA program. If you have never attended the Triduum liturgies or the Easter Vigil Mass, I invite you to join us this year. It is a truly amazing way to end our observance of Lent and be renewed in your commitment to Christ.