



LOOKING THROUGH STAINED GLASS

A Column by Fr. Tom

The Christian High Holy Days

Beginning this weekend, we celebrate the holiest days of our year, Holy Week. While they are not coincident with the Jewish High Holy Days, our Holy Week reflects one similar theme as these days for our Jewish brethren – a time of new beginnings. Our days do not reflect the beginning of a new year, but the beginning of a new life through Christ's salvific Passion, Death and Resurrection.

We begin our Holy Week this weekend with Palm Sunday. On this day, we celebrate Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. However, already we have an eye toward the endgame, which is His Crucifixion. This Mass is the only Mass that includes two Gospels: one from Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, which we read at the beginning of Mass as we re-enact this episode with our own palm waving; and one that retells Jesus' Passion, which comes from Mark's Gospel this year.

The next three days of Holy Week are the last three days of Lent and serve as preparation for the three holiest days of the year, the Triduum: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. Participating in the liturgies of the Triduum helps to prepare our hearts for the new beginning and new life in Christ that comes with Easter.

Holy Thursday traditionally has two liturgies: The Chrism Mass and The Mass of the Lord's Supper. Many dioceses, including our own, transfer the Chrism Mass to a day earlier in Holy Week for pastoral reasons. In the Diocese of Palm Beach, the Chrism Mass is held on Holy Tuesday. The highlight and main purpose of the Chrism Mass is the Bishop blessing the Holy Oils for use throughout the year, including the Oil of the Sick, Oil of Catechumens, and the Sacred Chrism (hence the name of the Mass). These oils will be used by the clergy of the Diocese to celebrate the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Anointing of the Sick and Ordination. In this Mass, we see the renewal of our Sacramental life, which is part of our life in Christ.

The Mass of the Lord's Supper places special emphasis on another Sacrament – the Eucharist. Jesus gave us this Sacrament to remind us of His enduring love for us through this special gift of Himself. A special moment is also included when the priest washes the feet of several representatives of the parish, re-enacting the model of service that Jesus displayed when He washed the feet of His Apostles, another outward sign of his great love. [JN 13:15]

The liturgy of Good Friday of the Lord's Passion completes the gift of Jesus that he began at the Last Supper. On Thursday, he gave Himself – Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity – to us in the Eucharist. On Friday, he gave his life for us on the Cross to pay the debt of our sins. We are washed clean by the Blood of Jesus. We are saved by his free gift of Himself. We are freed by His subjection to punishment. We are made whole by his being broken.

The culmination of the Triduum comes in the Mass of the Lord's Resurrection on Holy Saturday evening – the Easter Vigil. While many people forego this Mass because it is longer than most, it is one of the most beautiful celebrations of our entire year. It is packed with great meaning and celebration. The Mass begins with the blessing of new fire and water, symbols of Christ bringing us new life. It moves through a wonderful retelling of the story of salvation with several readings. While this Mass is filled with many highlights, one of the more emotional and joyous moments is the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) for our RCIA Candidates and Catechumens. With the celebration of this Mass, Holy Week and the Triduum end and the renewal of Easter begins!

If at all possible, please plan to take advantage of our various liturgies for Holy Week, so that you may enter more fully into the beauty and wonder of our faith as found in these Christian High Holy Days! [You will find our Holy Week Schedule in this bulletin.]