

TIMELY TOPICS



DIOCESE OF COLUMBUS, OFFICE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND CATECHESIS

Holy Week Symbols, Rituals, and Customs

Palms are a traditional sign of victory. When Christ made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the people lining the streets used palms to honor him. The palms we use on Palm Sunday are later burned and the ashes are used for the next year's Ash Wednesday. During the year, they may be woven into small crosses, used as markers on doors, placed behind a cross/crucifix, etc.

Washing of the Feet was, according to the Gospel of John, the gesture and example of love and service Jesus gave his disciples at the Last Supper. In Biblical times, people walked everywhere on dusty dirt roads in their bare feet or wearing sandals. Washing the feet of guests was usually done by the lowest servant. By performing this most humble act of washing his disciples' feet, Jesus taught them, and us, to respect and serve others, regardless of status. "For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you." (John 13:15)

Stripping the Altar occurs after the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday. In silence, the main altar is stripped and all decorations in the church are removed except those at the altar of repose. This is symbolic of Christ being stripped of his garments. The Blessed Sacrament is removed from the church in solemn procession to a place of repose, usually a chapel, for adoration by the faithful. This begins the hours of "waiting" with Jesus as the saving events begin to unfold. The altar is again stripped at the conclusion of the Good Friday Services; the tabernacle is left empty and open; no lights are left burning in the sanctuary and the crucifix takes the place of honor.

The Cross is revered as the principal symbol of the Christian faith. In the symbol of the Cross, we can see the extent of human tragedy, the effects of original sin, and the infinite love of God.

Veneration of the Cross dates back to fourth-century Jerusalem. The celebrant unveils the crucifix in three stages, singing each time, "Behold the wood of the cross, on which hung the Salvation of the world." The congregation responds "Come, let us worship." The cross is then laid at the foot of the altar and those present come forward in procession to kiss it, touch it reverently, or bow before it in an act of veneration.

By washing his disciples' feet, Jesus taught them, and us, to respect and serve others, regardless of status.

Crown of Thorns symbolizes Christ's suffering, torture and humiliation as he was mocked as the "King of the Jews."

Red is worn on Good Friday, symbolizing the supreme sacrifice of life made by God's love for us.

Nails were the instruments of torture used to fix Christ on the cross.

Hot Cross Buns are sweet rolls with the a cross cut into them. Sometimes the cross is created with frosting. They are one of several traditional European breads marked with a cross for Good Friday. According to tradition, these buns originated at St. Alban's Abbey in 1361, where the monks gave them to the poor who came there. Legend says that the buns did not mold as regular bread did, and that eating them on Good Friday would protect the home from fire.✂

Inside this issue

Ideas for Every Age	2
Correlation to Certification Standards & the Graded Course of Study	3
Resources	3

Ideas for every age

Symbols

The school, PSR and Adult Faith committee could work together to make pictures and information about the various symbols available; RCIA members also could do this.

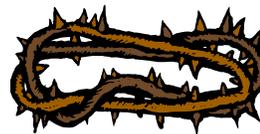
- ☞ The learners research the symbols commonly used in Lent.
- ☞ Each person chooses a symbol to design. The symbols should be at least the size of a standard piece of paper (8½ x 11 inches). Tag board is easy to use and is more durable. Draw and color the symbols, using crayons, markers, poster paint; then cut them out.
- ☞ Make a display board of symbols and post the symbols during Lent in a church hall or church gathering space.
- ☞ With larger groups, Easter symbols could be included – or make a second display with the symbols of Easter. See next week's *Timely Topics* for information on Easter Symbols.

In-service with catechetical staff or school faculty:

- ☞ Use the list of symbols from last week's issue ([part 1](#)) and from this issue (part 2) of *Timely Topics*; hold a "pop quiz," jeopardy-style, e.g., the question: What color is used on the third Sunday of Lent to symbolize joyful anticipation?
- ☞ With a large group, divide into two teams; with a small group, keep individual scores.
- ☞ Distribute a "prize" – something other than candy! e.g., a pen, a holy card, a small candle, a lapel pin of a symbol (cross, fish, etc.)
- ☞ Encourage your staff to do something similar or the activity above with their learners.

Scavenger Hunt

1. Arrange some symbols of Lent/Holy Week (list from parts 1 and 2) around the room, adding others such as a torn curtain, dice, sponge and vinegar, bowl and towel, wooden cross, alabaster vase, nails, 30 silver coins, thorn-cross, palm branches, chalice, grapes, wine bottle, loaf of unsliced bread, donkey, rock, praying hands, rooster, etc.
 - ☞ plan a **Bible scavenger hunt** in which learners find the Bible reference for as many objects as possible within a specified time, e.g., 15 minutes or whatever seems age-appropriate (*teams or individuals; prizes as above*)
 - ☞ for younger participants, read aloud each Bible reference; Learners identify the symbol and match what they hear with the objects they see (raise hand and point; get up and *walk*, to stand next to the object, etc.); in the end, each one chooses a symbol to draw and prints the biblical reference below it
2. Review your findings and the meaning of the symbols.



Correlation to Certification Standards & the Graded Course of Study

Religion Graded Course of Study

Content Standard II-C:

Describe Jesus Christ as our Savior who redeemed us by his life, death, resurrection and ascension.

National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers

Standard 3, Catholic Theology:

3.2.2 Describe the meanings and message of the paschal mystery

3.4.1 Explain basic liturgical principles, the liturgical year . . . the devotional and sacramental life of the church, and components of liturgical celebrations

The Six Tasks of Catechesis

Knowledge of the Faith

“ . . . By deepening knowledge of the faith, catechesis nourishes not only the life of faith but equips it to explain itself to the world . . . ”

Liturgical Education

“ . . . catechesis, along with promoting a knowledge of the liturgy and the sacraments, must also educate the disciples of Jesus Christ for prayer . . . ”

Teaching to Pray

“ . . . When catechesis is permeated by a climate of prayer , the assimilation of the entire Christian life reaches its summit . . . ”

Resources

Ball, Ann. Encyclopedia of Catholic Devotions and Practices. Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2003.

Dues, Greg. Catholic Customs & Traditions: A popular guide. Revised and Updated. New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2000.

Editors of Modern Liturgy. The Triduum Book. San Jose, CA: Resource Publications, Inc., 1997.

Klein, Peter, Rev. The Catholic Source Book. newly revised. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Religion Publishers, 2007.

Larkin, Jean. Totally Lent! A Child's Journey to Easter 2011. Dayton, OH: Pflaum Publishing Group, 2011

Larkin, Jean. Totally Lent! A Kid's Journey to Easter 2011. Dayton, OH: Pflaum Publishing Group, 2011