

Walk with Jesus during Holy Week

During Holy Week, we look forward to the most significant event in all of history: Someone just like us is dead. In a tomb. No pulse. Then He becomes alive again. This is the glory that we know as Easter. Let's walk in the steps of Jesus during this week to prepare our hearts to rise with His at the Resurrection.

Palm Sunday: Our celebration of Holy Week begins with the triumphant entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem to begin his final week. As you receive your palms, imagine that you are part of that vast crowd. Let the palms remind you to praise him with a true and lasting devotion. That evening, Jesus returned to Bethany, a town outside of Jerusalem. Perhaps he stayed with his friends Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. Pray with Jesus as he ponders the difficult days ahead of him.

Monday of Holy Week: Jesus returns to Jerusalem today and -- seeing shameful, commercial practices in the Temple area -- he drives out the merchants and money changers declaring that His Father's house was not to be a den of thieves. He returned to Bethany that night. Pray with Jesus as he is zealous to purify us.

Tuesday of Holy Week: Jesus again returns to Jerusalem where he is confronted by the Temple leadership for what he did the day before. They question his authority. He also teaches extensively, using the parables of the vineyard and of the wedding banquet. There is also the rebuke of the Sadducees who deny the resurrection. Continue to pray with Jesus and listen carefully to his final teachings just before his passion.

Wednesday of Holy Week: Traditionally this day is known as "Spy Wednesday" because it was on this Wednesday before the crucifixion that Judas conspired to hand Jesus over. For this he was paid 30 pieces of silver. Jesus likely spent the day in Bethany. In the evening, Mary of Bethany anoints Jesus with costly perfumed oil. Judas objects but Jesus rebukes him and says Mary has anointed him for his burial. The wicked are plotting against Jesus. Are you praying?

Holy Thursday: This marks the beginning of the sacred Triduum, or "three days." Earlier this day, Jesus had given instructions to the disciples on how to prepare for the Passover meal, which will be his last supper. In the Mass of the Lord's Supper conducted in our church, we remember that meal which Jesus shared with his disciples. We are in the upper room with Jesus and the Apostles and do what they did. Through the ritual of washing the feet of 12 parishioners, we unite in service to one another.

Through our celebration of this first Mass and Holy Eucharist, we unite ourselves to Jesus and receive his Body and Blood as if for the first time. At this Eucharist, we especially thank God for his gift of the ministerial priesthood. After the Last Supper, the apostles and Jesus made a short journey to Gethsemane, where he asks them to pray. This is one of the saddest scenes in Biblical history. Jesus agonized over events to come while His disciples slept. Peter, James, and John gratified their tired bodies when Our Lord needed them most. No one watched with Him. There was but one opportunity to tenderly touch Jesus and gently wipe the blood-stained moisture from His brow ... but the disciples failed to meet the challenge. What would we have done? The liturgy ends in silence. It is an ancient custom to spend an hour before the reposed Blessed Sacrament tonight. We are with Jesus in the Garden and pray as he goes through his agony.

Good Friday: All through the night, Jesus has been locked in the dungeon of the high priest's house. Early this morning he was brought before Pilate who transferred his case to Herod. Herod sent him back

to Pilate who, sometime in the mid-morning, bowed to the pressure of the Temple leadership and the crowds, and condemned Jesus to a horrible death by crucifixion.

In the late morning, after being beaten and mocked, Jesus was taken by the soldiers through the city and up the hillside of Golgotha. By noon he is nailed to the cross where he hangs in agony for some three hours. He dies around three in the afternoon. He is taken down from the cross and placed in the tomb hastily before sundown. Today is a day of prayer, fasting, and abstinence. Whenever possible, we Christians are urged to keep today free of work, of social engagements, of entertainment, and to devote ourselves to communal prayer and worship.

This evening, we gather quietly in our church to enter into a time of prayer as we reflect on Jesus' death on the cross. We also pray for the needs of the world. To acknowledge the power of the cross in our lives today, we one by one come forward to venerate the cross with a gesture of reverence. Our hunger from this day of fasting is satisfied with Holy Communion distributed at the end of this liturgy. Consider, too, how the apostles might have gathered that night together in fear and prayer reflecting on all that happened.

Do we sometimes wonder about our self-worth and purpose in life? Be assured, the issue of our value was settled on the cross.

Holy Saturday: The body of Jesus is in the tomb but His soul is among the dead to announce the kingdom. The hour is coming, and now is when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear it will live. Consider what it must have been like for the dead in Sheol to awaken to the voice of Jesus!

Meanwhile, the disciples, heartbroken at the death of Jesus, observed the Jewish Sabbath in sorrow. They had forgotten the promise of Jesus that He would rise. We cannot forget His promise. We cannot forget. Tonight in our parishes after sundown we gather for the Great Easter Vigil where we will experience Jesus rising from the dead. We gather in darkness and light the Easter fire which reminds us that Jesus is light in the darkness. He is the light of the world.

Easter Sunday: On the first day of the week, the women came to anoint the body of Jesus. What they find is shocking: The stone at the entrance of the tomb has been rolled away. The tomb is empty. Angels appear and say, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen." Even though this is exactly what Jesus predicted, the Resurrection was and is the most incredible – and doubted – events of all time.

Even His disciples couldn't grasp its reality when they saw Him. He was dead. Locked in a tomb. They thought they were seeing a ghost! Nonetheless, we believe Jesus rose from the dead because Scripture recounts that more than 500 people saw Him after the Resurrection. Numerous people died as martyrs testifying to the very end that Jesus had been resurrected. The explosive growth of the Church through the centuries speaks to the One who is at the center of it all.

In this secular age when everything we believe about God is challenged, let's hold on to the peace that Jesus promises those who believe in Him. Let's affirm with Job who, despite his sufferings, never felt abandoned or forgotten by God: "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God. I myself will see him with my own eyes."