

Keeping the Triduum

Maureen A. Kelly, MA



Imagine planning for weeks and maybe even months to attend an important event in your life and then missing most of it, or getting tickets to the Super Bowl and arriving just in time to see people heading for the parking lot. That's what it might be like for people who don't realize that the rituals and reflections of the Triduum are a significant facet of their faith journey.

On a spiritual level, when we miss the Triduum liturgies we miss the remembering of the stories and events that form us as a baptized faithful community living out the Paschal Mystery—the dying and rising of Christ.

The Triduum, which includes Easter, is the highpoint of the liturgical year. It begins with the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday and concludes with evening prayer on Easter Sunday. It is a time for the faithful to stop and reflect on their Baptism, in order to become renewed in their own baptismal calling.

WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

In the very early Church, the Night of the Great Vigil or the Easter Vigil was the only annual celebration of Christians. Every Christian was expected to attend, and they did. It is interesting to note that the Masses of Easter Sunday began in order to provide for the overflow of people from the Vigil.

Two to three centuries later, fast days were set aside to prepare for the Great Vigil, and many Christians became fascinated with the historical unfolding of the events of Christ's Passion. Dramas and celebrations around these events developed into a longer celebration called the "Great Week," and later "Holy Week." Through the centuries, believers grew to understand Holy Week (what we now call Triduum) as a reenactment of the historical events in Jesus' life. During this time, some of the direct connection to the baptismal commitment faithful was lost. By the beginning of the twentieth century what had begun as the only celebration of the Easter Vigil became an early morning Holy Saturday celebration with very few faithful attending. The main focus was on Easter Sunday, with little connection between the Paschal Mystery and the renewal of baptismal promises by the faithful.

As a result of liturgical research into the early Church in the twentieth century, however, changes were made in the

way we celebrated Holy Week. Vatican II restored the catechumenate, known in most parishes today as the RCIA. With this change, the focus on the baptismal character of the Triduum and the Easter season reemerged with an emphasis on the already baptized assembly. That focus continues today as the baptized are called to consider more deeply what it means to be baptized into the dying and rising of Jesus and to live as the body of Christ in the world.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Holy Thursday: How does Jesus' example of "washing the feet" translate into action for Christians today? Reflect on the words of Jesus: "I have given you an example. What I have done, you also must do."

Good Friday: Jesus gave his life for our salvation. For what am I willing to lay down my life? Jesus entrusted his spirit into the hands of his Father. How willing am I to put my trust in God?

Holy Saturday: On this night, we are asked to reject sin and renew our faith in God and the Church. How does this renewal of baptismal promises help me to live a life of faith?

ACTIONS TO TAKE

- Attend the Triduum services with family or friends.
- Plan ways to fast from food and activities during the Triduum in order to experience it as a kind of retreat.
- With family or faith-sharing group, talk about what difference your own Baptism makes in your life. **R**

SCRIPTURE CORNER

John 13:1–15; Hebrews 4:14–16; Romans 6:3–11

Read and reflect on these passages. How are they calling you to prepare to renew your baptismal promises?

MAUREEN A. KELLY is an expert on sacramental catechesis and religious education. She holds an MA in theology from the Catholic University of Louvain and is a founding member of the North American Forum on the Catechumenate.