

Chaplain's Bulletin April 2, 2023



Dear Folks,

Today we begin Holy Week. Holy Week is the super bowl of the Catholic faith, and we get to the center of the Christian story. It begins with the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the last supper, the crucifixion, the time in the tomb, and the resurrection. Everything before this is leading up to this, and everything after this is because of this. During this week we try, as much as we possibly can, to avoid other meetings and other projects so that we can focus on this, our central mystery.

It begins with Palm Sunday. Jesus comes into His city as a triumphant king amid hosannas, but humbly, on a donkey instead of a mighty horse. We bless palms to be used throughout the year, a sign of praise to Jesus, and for next Ash Wednesday we will burn them, a reminder of the fragility of our devotion (how quickly humans can go from “Hosanna” to “Crucify Him”). We read the passion narrative from the Gospel for the year (this year, of course, is Matthew).

On Tuesday at the Cathedral, we will celebrate the Chrism Mass. Traditionally this was done on Holy Thursday morning, but it is celebrated on Tuesday evening so that more people can participate. Even so, we can only have a cathedral full of people attending (as a priest, I get an automatic seat; it's one of the perks of being a priest). We will bless the holy oils we use throughout the year. We have three holy oils (Don't let anyone tell you they are WD40, 10W30, and Oil of Olay: that is not true). The oil of the sick is a sign of God's healing, and is used for anointing the sick, and I keep a small container of it in my car just in case. The oil of catechumens is a sign of God's strength to fight evil and is used for people preparing for baptism. The Sacred Chrism is the holiest of the oils and is a mixture of olive oil and balsam perfume. It is a sign of the Holy Spirit, and is used at baptism, confirmation and the ordination of priests. During the Chrism Mass, the priests renew their priestly commitment, and the bishop reminds the people that priests need lots of prayers (he is not wrong).

On Holy Thursday we begin the Triduum, and that is one celebration that takes place over three days. It begins with Mass of the Lord's Supper, celebrating the institution of the Eucharist, as well as the institution of the priesthood. The Gospel is the washing of feet, and often the celebrant washes people's feet at Mass. After the prayer after communion, we usually have a procession with the Blessed Sacrament, place it in a reserve chapel, adore Him, and leave in silence (don't forget the silence). We don't have a closing blessing because the liturgy does not end; it simply pauses until the next day.

Good Friday is the one day of the year we don't have Mass. We begin in silence. We read the passion narrative from the Gospel of John. We have solemn intercessions. We show special respect and affection for the cross upon which Jesus won our salvation. We have a communion service with hosts that were consecrated on the previous day. We depart in silence.

Then on Saturday we have the Easter vigil. By Church law it begins after sundown. I shall not describe it; one should witness it, if at all possible. It's the greatest night of the year. I encourage as strongly as possible, for everyone to attend to Holy Week as best as their situation allows. What we celebrate is the center of everything.

Blessings,

Fr. Jim