

word on worship

The Morning Office During The Paschal Triduum

One of the challenges of the post Vatican II liturgical reform is the implementation of the Liturgy of the Hours on the parochial scene. It is lamentable that fifteen years after the publication of the revised Office, Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer are so infrequently found on the schedules of parish liturgical services. The success of the effort at implementation is probably proportionate to the *determination* and *enthusiasm* of pastoral ministers.

The 1988 Circular Letter of the Congregation for Divine Worship on the preparation and celebration of the Easter Feasts repeats the challenge. This certainly may be viewed as an indication of its seriousness.

It is recommended that there be a communal celebration of the Office of Readings and Morning Prayer on Good Friday and Holy Saturday. It is fitting that the bishop should celebrate the Office in the cathedral with, as far as possible, the participation of the clergy and people.

This Office, formerly called *Tenebrae*, held a special place in the devotion of the faithful as they meditated upon the passion, death and burial of the Lord while awaiting the announcement of the resurrection.

- *Circular Letter Concerning the Preparation and Celebration of the Easter Feasts*, Congregation for Divine Worship, 1988.

In the context of the above recommendation to celebrate Morning Prayer with the Office of Readings on the two days of the year when mornings are not ordinarily overcrowded with liturgical celebrations, the *challenge* becomes *opportunity*. If morning or evening prayer is already part of a parochial schedule the challenge is minimal: if not, here is a golden opportunity to do something about it.

Where morning prayer is already customary, the Office of Readings can be very easily joined to the usual celebration. The Morning Office thus becomes even more special on these days of the Easter Triduum. The General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours outlines the

method of combining the Office of Readings with Morning Prayer.

If the Office of Readings is said immediately before another Hour of the Office, then the appropriate hymn for that Hour may be sung at the beginning of the Office of Readings. At the end of the Office of Readings the prayer and conclusion are omitted, and in the Hour following the introductory verse with the *Glory to the Father* is omitted.

- *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours*, #99.

The success of the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, to great extent, depends upon the quality of the music ministry available. Ordinarily, for morning or evening prayer a cantor, and perhaps an instrumentalist (e.g. organist), is necessary. During the Paschal Triduum, however, accompaniment is eliminated, and so a good cantor or leader of song is essential.

The participation aid is *key*. The FDLC Publication, *The Easter Triduum*, is an excellent resource.

Not *everything* need be sung: the hymn, however, and the Gospel Canticle, if at all possible, should *always* be sung. One possibility is to recite the psalms in the Office of Readings and sing them at Morning Prayer.

The psalms may be sung in a variety of ways. The *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours* outlines the possibilities:

III. Methods of Singing the Psalms

121. Different psalms may be sung in different ways, to bring out their spiritual function and beauty. The choice of ways is dictated by the character or length of each psalm, by the language used, whether Latin or the vernacular, and especially by the kind of celebration, whether individually or with a group or with a congregation. The use of the psalms is not simply to provide a set amount of prayer; consideration has also been given to the need for variety and to the individual character of each psalm.

122. The psalms are sung or said in one of three ways,

according to the different usages sanctioned by tradition or experience: as a single unit without a break (*in directum*), or with two choirs or sections of the congregation singing alternate verses or strophes, or responsorially.

123. The antiphon for each psalm should always be recited at the beginning, as noted in nos. 113-120 above. At the end of the psalm the custom is maintained of concluding with the *Glory to the Father* and *As it was in the beginning*. This is the fitting conclusion that tradition recommends, and it gives to Old Testament prayer a quality of praise linked to a christological and trinitarian interpretation. The antiphon may be repeated at the end of the psalm.

124. When longer psalms occur, sections are indicated in the psalter to keep the threefold structure of the Hour, but great care has been taken not to distort the meaning of the psalm.

It is proper to keep this division, especially in a choral celebration in Latin; the *Glory to the Father* is added at the end of each section.

It is permissible, however, to choose between this traditional way and either pausing between the different sections of the same psalm or reciting the whole psalm, with its antiphon, as a single unit without a break.

125. In addition, when the character of a psalm suggests it, the divisions of the strophes are indicated, in order that, especially when the psalm is sung in the vernacular, the antiphons may be repeated after each strophe; in this case the *Glory to the Father* need be said only at the end of the psalm.

This last stated simple method, for the congregation to repeat the antiphon between the verses like the responsorial psalm at Mass, is very useful and minimizes the need to learn a lot of new music beforehand.

The fourteen-branched candlestick was an important visual element in the former *Tenebrae* service. A candlelabrum with seven candles can be used as a substitute in the current Office. One candle may be extinguished at the doxology of each psalm and canticle, beginning with the first psalm of the Office of Readings. The final candle is extinguished at the conclusion of the Gospel Canticle, the Canticle of Zechariah, at Morning Prayer. If the fourteen-branched candlestick is retained where one is available, the remaining candles may be extinguished during the verses of the Gospel Canticle. The use of incense to incense the altar, presider and congregation during the Gospel Canticle adds another sensory element, (*G. I. number 261*).

The *General Instruction* indicates the appropriate postures (and gestures) as follows:

263. All taking part stand:

- (a) during the introduction to the Office and the introductory verses of each Hour;
- (b) during the hymn;
- (c) during the Gospel Canticle;
- (d) during the intercessions, the Lord's Prayer and the concluding prayer.

264. All should sit to listen to the readings, except at

the Gospel.

265. While the psalms and other canticles (with their antiphons) are being said, the assembly either sits or stands, according to custom.

266. All make the sign of the cross, from forehead to breast and from left shoulder to right:

(a) at the beginning of the Hours, when *God, come to my assistance* is being said;

(b) at the beginning of the Gospel Canticles of Zechariah, of Mary and of Simeon.

The sign of the cross is made on the mouth at the beginning of the invitatory, at the words *Lord, open my lips*.

The psalm prayers, which are optional to begin with, might be appropriately omitted. If they are used, the congregation should stand, and the prayer may fittingly be preceded by *Let us pray* and concluded with the short conclusion as are the Prayer over the Gifts and Prayer after Communion at Mass.

It should be noted that the *General Instruction* urges the use of sacred silence:

XII. Sacred Silence

201. It is a general principle that care should be taken in liturgical actions to see that "a sacred silence is observed at its proper time." (Second Vatican Council, constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 30.) An opportunity for silence should therefore be provided in the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours.

202. In order to receive in our hearts the full resonance of the voice of the Holy Spirit and to unite our personal prayer more closely with the word of God and the public voice of the Church, it is permissible, as occasion offers and prudence suggests, to have an interval of silence, either after the repetition of the antiphon at the end of the psalm, in the traditional way, especially if the psalm prayer (see no. 112) is to be said after the pause, or after the short or longer readings, before or after the responsory.

Care must be taken to avoid the kind of silence that would disturb the structure of the Office, or embarrass and weary those taking part.

203. In individual recitation there is greater freedom to pause in meditation on some text that moves the spirit, and the Office does not on this account lose its public character.

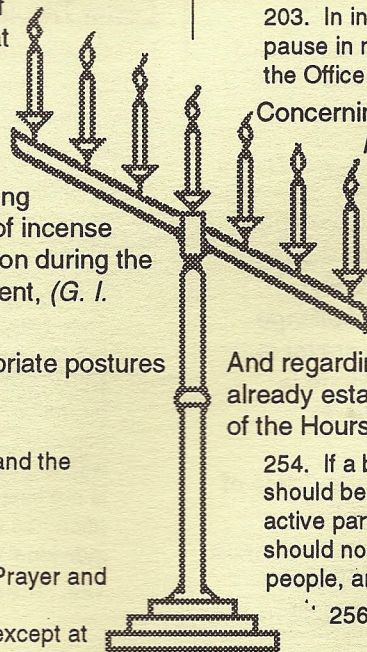
Concerning vesture, the following from the *General Instruction* is helpful:

255. The priest or deacon who presides at a celebration may wear a stole over the alb or surplice; a priest may also wear a cope. On greater solemnities there is nothing to prevent several priests from wearing copes or several deacons from wearing dalmatics.

And regarding the proper distribution of roles, principles already established apply in the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours as well:

254. If a bishop presides, especially in the cathedral, he should be attended by his priests and by ministers, with full active participation by the people. A priest or deacon should normally preside at every celebration with the people, and ministers should also be present.

256. It is for the presiding priest or deacon, from the



chair, to open the celebration with the introductory verse, to begin the Lord's Prayer, to say the concluding prayer, to greet the people, bless them and dismiss them.

257. Either the priest or a minister may give out the intercessions.

258. In the absence of a priest or deacon, the one who presides at the Office is only one among equals; he does not enter the sanctuary or greet and bless the people.

259. Those who act as readers stand in a suitable place to read either the long readings or the short readings.

The following outline and chart may be helpful in structuring the Morning Office during the Paschal Triduum:

Outline of Service

Introduction
Hymn

Office of Readings

Ant. 1 & Psalm

Silence

Ant. 2 & Psalm

Silence

Ant. 3 & Psalm

Silence

Versicle & Response

Reading I

Silence

Responsory

Reading II

Silence

Responsory

Morning Prayer

Ant. 1 & Psalm

Silence

Ant. 2 & Canticle

Silence

Ant. 3 & Psalm

Silence

Reading

Silence

Responsory

(Homily followed by Silence)

Ant. & Gospel Canticle

Intercessions

Lord's Prayer

Prayer

Concluding Rite & Dismissal (as at Mass)

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The Time of the Easter Vigil

The February 1992 edition of the Newsletter of the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy of the United States Catholic Conference made the following official statement concerning the proper time for the celebration of the Easter Vigil within the United States:

The Roman Missal states that the entire celebration of the Easter Vigil takes place at night: the vigil should not begin before nightfall, and it should end before daybreak on Sunday. Yet this norm often goes unobserved. The *Circular Letter Concerning the Preparation and Celebration of the Easter Feasts*, issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship in 1988, notes that "the very concept of the vigil has almost come to be forgotten in some places, with the result that it is celebrated as if it were an evening Mass, in the same way and at the same time as the Mass celebrated on Saturday evening in anticipation of the Sunday."

The *Circular Letter* no. 78, repeats the norm provided in the Roman Missal and adds that "this rule is to be taken according to its strictest sense. Reprehensible are those abuses and practices that have crept into many places in violation of this ruling, whereby the Easter Vigil is celebrated at the time of day that it is customary to celebrate anticipated Sunday Masses."

Liturgical law leaves no doubt as to when the Easter Vigil should be celebrated. This year Easter occurs after clocks in most parts of the United States have been moved ahead one hour for daylight savings time. Pastoral planners should contact a local weather station for the time *sunset* will occur on April 18, 1992. To that time another 45 minutes or one hour should be added to determine the approximate time of *nightfall*. For example, if sunset occurs at 7:43 p.m. DST in a given location, the celebration of the Easter Vigil should not begin before 8:30 p.m.

✦

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Holy Week Q & A

How is the Blessed Sacrament to be reserved during the Easter Triduum?

The rubrics in the Sacramentary contain the following directives for the beginning of the Easter Triduum on Holy Thursday: "The tabernacle should be entirely empty; a sufficient amount of bread should be consecrated at this Mass for the communion of the clergy and laity today and tomorrow." Of all days when we commemorate the institution of the eucharist, communion under both kinds would be most appropriate. Similarly, the recent circular letter *Concerning the Preparation and Celebration of the Easter Feasts* (#53) strongly recommends that holy communion be brought to the sick and infirm on this day by ministers dismissed at communion time so that the homebound "may be more closely united to the celebrating Church."

At the conclusion of the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper this consecrated bread is transferred in solemn procession to the place of reposition. Question: where is the proper place of reposition? It depends on the liturgical environment of the church building. A special tabernacle need not always be erected in addition to the tabernacle used during the rest of the year. If the stationary tabernacle is not directly behind the main altar but is located to the side, the same tabernacle could serve as the appropriate place of reposition and be specially decorated for the occasion. Eucharistic adoration is encouraged until midnight when a new dimension of the Sacred Triduum takes over and the day of the Lord's passion begins.

The restored Good Friday Celebration of the Lord's Passion provides for holy communion with the eucharistic bread consecrated and reserved on Holy Thursday. The assembly stands in silence as the eucharistic elements are brought from the tabernacle/place of reposition to the altar. Afterwards, the ciborium is to be taken to a place prepared outside the church, very often a safe or other secure place in the sacristy with a tabernacle candle lit to indicate the special eucharistic presence of the Lord. The point of all this, re-enforced in the stripping of the altar, is well-expressed in the Liturgical Press Holy Week missalette: "Christ is no longer present in the church in the Blessed Sacrament. Until the Easter Vigil, Christians experience something of the great void felt by the apostles after the death of the Lord." It would appear that the Blessed Sacrament is at this time reserved only for emergency situations, for the rubrics specify that on Holy Saturday holy communion may be given only as viaticum.

Finally, all the faithful at the Easter Vigil should receive eucharistic bread and wine freshly consecrated at the Vigil eucharist. This could be facilitated if all but a few

consecrated altar breads were consumed on Good Friday. This procedure would more adequately fulfill the recurring Vatican directives that the communion received at Mass be consecrated at the same eucharist. The faithful would thus receive the Body and Blood of Christ which is the fruit of the eucharistic sacrifice in which they have participated by offering themselves with the Victim on the altar. How especially fitting this would be at the Easter Vigil which is the paradigm of all eucharistic celebrations.

What are we celebrating at the Easter Vigil?

The Easter Vigil is the annual celebration of the paschal liturgy. The paschal mystery of Jesus' death and resurrection, which constitutes our redemption and is the content of every liturgical celebration, is especially highlighted on this night when we recall Jesus' resurrection from the dead and enter more deeply into this saving mystery. Quite simply, since perhaps apostolic times the Easter Vigil has been the paramount liturgical celebration of the Church year.

Seen in this light, the Vigil is not an anticipated Mass of Easter Sunday. Rather, a whole different dynamic obtains: the Easter Vigil is *the* paschal liturgy celebrating Jesus passage from death to life. Easter Sunday is the first of the great fifty days of the Easter season celebrating the event of Christ's resurrection and our sharing in his risen life.

Because the Easter Vigil is the pre-eminent celebration of the liturgical year, from earliest times the Vigil was the preferred occasion to initiate new members into the Church through the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and first eucharist. The recently restored *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* has made this once more a reality in many of our parishes. One commentator has remarked that the Easter Vigil without baptism and initiation is almost like attempting to celebrate the Mass without bread and wine: so intrinsic are the sacraments of Christian initiation to the Easter Vigil. At the same time we need to see that the Vigil is celebrated not only for the sake of the candidates for initiation, but for all the members of the Church who on this night are renewing their own baptismal commitment as we celebrate the most important liturgy of the year, the annual pasch of the Lord. Aidan Kavanagh (*Made, Not Born* p. 126) expressed it well when he remarked: "Neither the (Easter) vigil nor a funeral (nor for that matter a wedding or an ordination) is a liturgy 'for' someone. They are celebrations *of* the Church, *by* the Church, and *for* the Church under the criteria of the gospel."

One way of putting things into perspective would be to

view the light service as the introduction; the Gospel in turn is the proclamation of the Easter passage from death to life. In the eucharistic liturgy the Risen Lord breaks bread with his disciples. Because the Easter Vigil is the central eucharist of the year, the Church invites all its potential members to partake. Those not yet baptized and initiated are made capable of participation in eucharistic communion by the sacrament of baptism.



What do we mean by the Fifty Days of Easter?

Until the fourth century the only two feasts celebrated in the Church were the weekly (Sunday) and annual (Easter) celebration of the Lord's pasch. The annual pasch or Easter Vigil was preceded by two or three days of fasting and issued forth into the fifty days of the Easter season. Hence the Greek *pentecoste* which means fifty, thus referring to the fiftieth day culminating the unitive festival of Easter. These fifty days were considered by St. Athanasius to be "a great Sunday;" there was to be no kneeling at prayer nor fasting during this time.

The restored calendar has recovered something of this unitive character of the Easter season of fifty days, while

still retaining the special significance of the fiftieth day, the feast of Pentecost commemorating the outpouring of the Holy Spirit which completes the mission of the risen Christ until he comes again. For example, the Sundays are no longer counted as Sundays *after* Easter, but *of* Easter. The Easter candle, previously extinguished and removed from the sanctuary on Ascension Thursday, now remains through Pentecost. And the vigil and octave of Pentecost are now suppressed.

Some concrete ways parishes might highlight the significance of the fifty days of the Easter season would be the following:

1. Sprinkle the assembly with holy water on the Sundays of Easter. This reminder and renewal of baptism can replace the penitential rite at Mass.
2. Give careful attention to the singing of the Easter Alleluia.
3. Sing the prefaces of the eucharistic prayers on Sundays, so that the manner of celebration might more closely match the festive proclamation of the words: "We praise you with greater joy than ever in this Easter season, Christ became our paschal sacrifice.
4. Continue the colorful spring flowers and Easter lilies throughout the fifty days, even if they need to be replenished
5. Restore Easter customs and blessings of special foods so that the liturgy is more properly related to the life of the faithful. Appropriate prayers can be found in the *Book of Blessings* and *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers*.
6. Implement fully the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. The Easter seasons coincides with the final period of the catechumenate called mystagogy, when the newly initiated Catholic Christians are more completely instructed about the sacramental life and find their place in the Church as Spirit-filled Christians imbued with a sense of mission.✠

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From the Editor:.....

At the last meeting of the editorial board of Word on Worship, the members had the opportunity to review the responses to the reader survey found in the last issue. The editorial board not only took the time to review the responses, but discussed the implications of what we found. We appreciated the candor reflected in the survey and the suggestions offered. Future meetings of the board will concentrate on ways in which we can implement what our readers have offered. Just to update you on what we hope to offer in future issues, we will be devoting two of the issues to articles celebrating two anniversaries: the 20th anniversary of the document *Music in Catholic Worship* and the 20th anniversary of the *Directory of Masses with Children*. While not all articles in each issue will pertain exclusively to these two areas, we hope to offer informative material on these topics.

The editorial board hopes that many of our readers who did not have the opportunity to send in the Readership Survey will still do so. We rely on your input and need to know how we can continue to serve you through the material we offer. May the risen Lord bless your work with the People of God.✠

Rev. Robert Laferrera
Editor

Reception of the Holy Oils

On March 21, 1988, the members of the NCCB Administrative Committee approved the rites contained in the United States edition of the *Book of Blessings* (see *Newsletter*, Vol. XXIV, pp. 22-23). They also gave approval to three additional rites relating to the liturgical year which may be celebrated during the eucharistic liturgy: Order for the Proclamation of the Birth of Christ (on Christmas); Order for the Proclamation of the Date of Easter on Epiphany; Order for the Reception of the Holy Oils. These brief rites were confirmed by the Congregation for Divine Worship when it also confirmed the *Book of Blessings* (Prot. N. 699/88, dated January 27, 1989). The rites will be incorporated into the next edition of the *Sacramentary*. However, since that edition is not expected to be available for several years, the rites will soon be published in the form of a fascicle which can be inserted into the present edition of the *Sacramentary*. The date of publication and the publishers will be indicated in a future issue of the *Newsletter*.

Order for the Reception of the Holy Oils*

Introduction

1. It is appropriate that the oil of the sick, the oil of catechumens, and the holy chrism, which are blessed by the bishop during the Chrism Mass, be presented to and received by the local parish community.
2. The presentation of the holy oils may take place at the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday, or, if the oils are not blessed on Holy Thursday, on another day.
3. The oils should be reserved in a suitable repository in the presbyterium or near the baptismal font.
4. The oils, in suitable vessels, are carried in the entrance procession by ministers or other persons. The vessels of oil are placed on a table which has been prepared for them in the sanctuary. The priest may incense the oils after he has incensed the altar.
5. After the greeting of the Mass the priest may briefly explain the significance of the blessing of the oils and their use. The oils are then placed in the repository where they are to be reserved and the Mass continues in the usual manner.
6. The following, or other words, may be used to explain the significance of the oils:

Oil of the Sick

This oil of the sick has been blessed by our bishop for the healing of body, mind, and soul. May the sick, who are anointed with it, experience the compassion of Christ and his saving love.

Oil of Catechumens

This oil of catechumens has been blessed by our bishop for the anointing of those preparing for baptism. Through this anointing they are strengthened by Christ to resist the power of Satan and reject evil in all its forms, as they prepare for the saving waters of baptism.

Holy Chrism

This holy chrism, a mixture of olive oil and perfume, has been consecrated by our bishop and the priests of our diocese. It will be used to anoint infants after baptism, those who are to be confirmed, bishops and priests at their ordination, and altars and churches at the time of their dedication.

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Blessings During the Easter Season

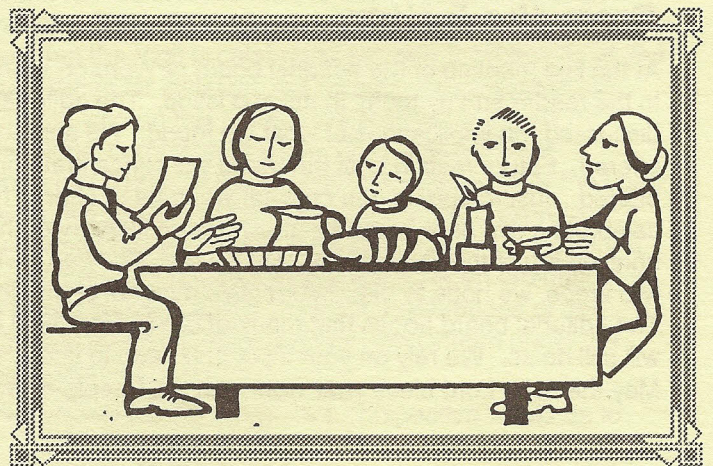
Previous issues of the *Newsletter* have presented commentary on some of the blessings related to feasts and seasons which are contained in the new *Book of Blessings* (see *Newsletter*, Vol. XXV, pp. 42-43, 45-46). Several other blessings may fruitfully be celebrated in the Easter season and in early summer.

Chapter 54 of the *Book of Blessings* provides an Order for the Blessing of Food for the First Meal of Easter. The practice of blessing food for Easter arose in connection with the discipline of the Lenten fast and the special Paschal fast during the Easter Triduum. Easter was the first day when meat, eggs, cheese, and other foods could again be eaten, and so the return of these foods to the daily diet was celebrated with special blessings. Although the Paschal fast during the Triduum is no longer of obligation (except on Good Friday), its observance is highly encouraged especially to support the elect who will be initiated at the Easter Vigil.

The blessing of the food which was used to break the Paschal fast had customarily taken place during the morning or early afternoon of Holy Saturday. The *Circular Letter Concerning the Preparation and Celebration of the Easter Feasts* (January 16, 1988) notes that "festive customs and traditions associated with this day (Holy Saturday) because of the former practice of anticipating the celebration of Easter on Holy Saturday should be reserved for Easter night and the day that follows" (no. 76).

Accordingly, food may be blessed before or after the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday or on Easter morning for consumption at the first meal of Easter, when fasting is ended and the Church is filled with joy. The *book of Blessings* provides an order of blessing within a celebration of the Word of God and a shorter rite that may appropriately be used after the Easter Vigil. The blessings may be used by a priest, a deacon, or a properly designated layperson. A form of this blessing for use in the home is given in *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers* (p. 152).

The blessings of homes may be celebrated during the Christmas season (see *Newsletter*, Vol. XXV, p. 43). The same order of blessing, Chapter 50 of the *Book of Blessings*, also proper texts for the blessing of homes during the Easter season. An adapted form of this blessing is given in *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers* (pp. 153-156).✠



FOOT WASHING

The following statement about the foot-washing rite has been issued by the Secretariat of the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy (February, 1987).



The Lord Jesus washed the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper as a sign of the new commandment that Christians should love one another. "This is how all will know you for my disciples: by your love for one another" (see John 13:34-35). For centuries the church has imitated the Lord through the ritual enactment of the new commandment of Jesus Christ in the washing of feet on Holy Thursday.

2. Although the practice had fallen into disuse for a long time in parish celebrations, it was restored in 1955 by Pope Pius XII as a part of the general reform of Holy Week. At that time the traditional significance of the rite of foot washing was stated by the Sacred Congregation of Rites in the following words: "Where the washing of feet, to show the Lord's commandment about fraternal charity, is performed in a Church according to the rubrics of the restored of Holy Week, the faithful should be instructed on the profound meaning of this sacred rite and should be taught that it is only proper that they should abound in works of Christian charity on this day."

3. The principal and traditional meaning of the Holy Thursday mandatum, as underscored by the decree of the congregation, is the biblical injunction of Christian charity: Christ's disciples are to love one another. For this reason, the priest who presides at the Holy Thursday liturgy portrays the biblical scene of the gospel by washing the feet of some of the faithful.

4. Because the gospel of the mandatum read on Holy Thursday also depicts Jesus as the "Teacher and Lord" who humbly serves his disciples by performing this extraordinary gesture which goes beyond the laws of hospitality, the element of humble service has accentuated the celebration of the foot washing rite in the United States over the last decade or more. In this regard, it has become customary in many places to invite both men and women to be participants in this rite in recognition of the service that should be given by all the faithful to the Church and to the world. Thus, in the United States, a variation in the rite developed in which not only charity is signified but also humble service.

5. While this variation may differ from the rubric of the Sacramentary which mentions only men ("viri selecti"), it may nevertheless be said that the intention to emphasize service along with charity in the celebration of the rite is an understandable way of accentuating the evangelical command of the Lord, "who came to serve and not to be served," that all members of the Church must serve one another in love.

6. The liturgy is always an act of ecclesial unity and Christian charity, of which the Holy Thursday foot washing rite is an eminent sign. All should obey the Lord's new commandment to love one another with an abundance of love, especially at this most sacred time of the liturgical year when the Lord's passion, death, and resurrection are remembered and celebrated in the powerful rites of the Triduum.✠

Holy Thursday - Washing of the Feet

The ritual of Holy Thursday focuses on the Lord's supper. The ceremony of the washing of the feet, included in the liturgy since the 1956 restoration is not meant to be a dramatic presentation of the Last Supper. It may appear this way, however, when alternative actions are substituted for the traditional performance of the ritual or when actions like washing of hands are used to create a sense of inclusiveness through the ceremony.

The ceremony has ancient roots. It was clearly established as part of Holy Thursday by the seventh century and appears earlier as part of a baptismal ritual in Spain. It was apparently a regular practice in the sixth century Rule of St. Benedict where it functioned as a chance for service to visitors and to the members of the community. It is understandable that parish liturgy planners seek somewhere to embellish the ceremony because it no longer appears relevant. We are not by and large a society that deals well with symbolism, especially when the symbolism seems removed from everyday life. Nonetheless, as with liturgy in general the best approach is not to try to make it better, but to allow it to speak for itself. Symbols speak to us both intellectually and on deeper levels of feeling and emotion. It is not necessary to "understand" the symbol to be deeply moved.

When Jesus washed the feet of the apostles it was not some act of self deprecation. Rather there are two valid interpretations of the action. The one, less ascribed to, was that through the cleansing of the water one shared in the mystery and sanctification of Jesus' death and resurrection. The more common interpretation is a call to humility and to loving service to others. In his work *Making More of Holy Week*, Edmund Flood suggests that we consider all the people called to service even as we celebrate our liturgy: nurses, social workers, care providers. There is nothing debasing in what they do as they seek to serve. Similarly Jesus says to us that if we are truly followers of his we are called to service, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, and to shelter the homeless. The example set by Jesus is that it is not quite enough to say "I believe," though that is a significant act. Our belief must be followed up by action towards others that is rooted in that belief. It may well be that rough the activity of humble service one can more easily come to the deeper sense of the sharing in some part with the salvific action of Jesus.

In the ceremony we recall that Jesus perceived himself as one who was called to serve, and that as his followers we too are called to that same loving service to others. ✠

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Newsletter

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