

FAITH FORMATION
March 15, 2012

Of the four poles that make up Church, this session will focus on Faith Formation. Faith Formation can be about preparing for sacraments, bible study, retreats, your D & P Thinkfast etc. Ultimately we are all part of this because we all can share our time, our talents, our faith with others.

Pray together: The Apostles Creed (I Believe In God)

Our session is going to be directed towards a preparation for and an understanding of the Easter Triduum. Why? Because it is a celebration that includes all that we believe – it is our Christian story. Ask one of the candidates to relate something of their life story, It doesn't change.

Try to enter into the minds and hearts of Jesus' friends as they experience the events preceding his death upon the cross.

"Imagine you are a disciple of Jesus living at the time of Jesus. You have just witnessed the most incredible events. To begin with, you were expecting the Messiah to be a great warrior king – a person who would conquer all the enemies of God's people with power and might. Instead comes a gentle, soft-spoken man names Jesus. He was born into a very humble family and is the son of a carpenter. He conquers with kindness, acceptance, and love. He spends too much of his time talking with the wrong crowd. He reaches out to everyone – lepers, sinners, Samaritans, and even women with questionable reputations. Though he isn't what you expected, you are drawn to him. When you are with him, you are at peace.

In fact, many people are drawn to him. His openness, his honesty, his caring are so refreshing to the soul. As he enters into Jerusalem, the crowds greet him with palm branches and words of honor.

Then one night, after he washes your feet in an ultimate act of service and shares an intimate meal with you, he is taken from your midst by an angry crowd. He is beaten, ridiculed, and eventually hung from a cross with a pair of common criminals. You are overtaken by fear and confusion, and you wonder, 'Is this my king?'
(taken from journey of faith for teens L7 –lent – the meaning of holy week)

HOLY WEEK begins with "Palm Sunday, now called "Passion Sunday", the week before Easter. This is the only Sunday on which two gospels are read.

The first is the narration of Jesus riding through the streets on a donkey, a humble means of transport, with the crowd honoring him as the Son of God and heir to the kingdom, by laying down palms in the roadway. The palm tree became a sign of royalty and victory – the Roman soldiers carried palms in their victory parades in Rome; therefore the people were greeting Jesus in a spirit of joy and triumph.

This is in great contrast to the second Gospel, “The Passion and Death of Jesus” – Jesus being led through the streets, bloody and beaten like a common criminal – a contrast about how we can be loyal followers of Christ one day and give in to our weaknesses the next.

Triduum (tri-doo-oom) means a three day period of prayer in preparation for an important feast. Easter Triduum refers to Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday.

HOLY THURSDAY

The first reading is from “Exodus, one of the salvation stories referring to the “Passover”. (short pre-history)

At this time the Israelite people were enslaved in Egypt. They prayed for freedom. God sent messages to the King of Egypt through his prophets Moses and Aaron, asking the king to free his people. The king refused. God then tries to change his mind by sending plagues of snakes, frogs, locusts, changing rivers and wells to blood etc. – nothing moves the king to change his mind.

Have each candidate quietly read Exodus 12, 1-8, 12-14 – Pg. 256 in the Sunday Missal. (the story of Passover)

(This was a prelude to Moses through God’s power, parting the waters of the Red Sea and leading the Israelites out of Egypt to freedom.)

This was the Jewish feast of Passover that Jesus and his disciples were celebrating.

The SECOND READING tells us what took place at this Passover supper.

- Jesus initiates our celebration of Eucharist when he blesses the bread and wine.
- “This is my Body that is for you. This cup is the new covenant in my blood”.
- This was the first mass and the creation of the sacrament of First Communion.
- It was the beginning of the priesthood “Do this in memory of me”, conferring this gift of consecration on the disciples. (changing the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ.

GOSPEL:

History: Since travel in the Middle East could be a hot, dusty undertaking, it was considered an act of hospitality to have a servant wash the feet of guests.

In this Gospel, Jesus, considered to be the master by the disciples, insists on washing their feet; an example to them and to us of the humility and complete service to others required to be followers of Jesus; teaching us that all men are equal in the God’s eyes.

From this Jesus gives a new commandment: “Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another”.

Jesus also sets the stage for Good Friday by indicating that he would be betrayed. The altar table is stripped of it’s linen and we remove the Eucharist from the tabernacle and leave the door open as a sign of Jesus’ impending death.

GOOD FRIDAY:

Why Good? The word “good” originated from the traditional GOODE spelled with an e on the end meaning “holy”. This is a liturgy, not a mass since the consecration does not take place.

We read John’s gospel of the passion; the narration that continues from after the Last Supper, when Jesus and his disciples go to the garden of Gethsemane to pray until his death on the cross.

- we pray for the needs of the Church and the world.
- the presider processes a wooden cross from the back of the Church to the front, making three stops. Each time, he recites the words, “ Behold the wood of the Cross on which hung the salvation of the world.” to which we respond, “Come let us adore”.
- we venerate the cross individually by genuflecting or kissing the cross as we choose.
- we receive Holy Communion from the reserve consecrated on Holy Thursday.

Jesus is called the “Word of God”, because he is the savior that God promised to send to lead his people. From his birth to his death, his purpose was to teach God’s message; to atone for all sin by his death; to fulfill God’s promise that we too will rise from the dead to eternal life with God.

This should be a day of prayer, reflection and abstinence from meat and overeating.

HOLY SATURDAY

This is the holiest night of the Year – the night we celebrate our faith story and Christ’s victory over sin and death.

We begin after dark, a symbol of the time before Jesus “the light” came into the world. A fire is lit outside and blessed from which the Paschal or Easter candle is lit.

The candle represents Jesus Christ; the five pieces of incense embedded in the candle represent his five wounds – the nails in his hands and feet and the wound in his side. The Greek letters for Alpha and Omega represents the beginning and the end – we come from God and we return to God.

The fire itself is symbolic of the new life of resurrection.

The church too is dark. The presider enters, followed by the people. He makes three stops going up the aisle saying at each stop “The light of Christ” to which we respond “Thanks be to God”. This is in contrast to the stops of Good Friday with the Cross representing death. We are going from death to new life. During this time the people light their tapers from the Paschal candle.

This part of the vigil is made up of seven readings divided by a short prayer and a psalm. We choose five of the seven, all old testament readings that tell the story of our creation and the God who loved and watched over his people through the prophets.

The First Reading is always the creation story from Genesis, meaning origin. It tells of the:

- creation of the universe and mankind.

- that we are made in the image and likeness of God – man is a complete human having a body and a soul, is able to know and love his Creator, has the dignity of a person and is capable of knowledge.
- describes the Spirit of God hovering over the waters - we become aware of the Holy Spirit right from the beginning.

Another reading from Genesis, is the story of Abraham and his son Isaac. God tests Abraham's faith by asking him to offer his son as a sacrifice. Abraham, in complete faith and obedience to God, is compliant right up until the point where God stops him, saving Isaac.

The binding of Isaac is also significant. Just as Abraham is being obedient to the mysterious call of God, so is Isaac. There is no struggle in his being bound for sacrifice. He is freely offering himself, confident in his father's assurance that God will provide. A message to all of us to place our trust in God's promises.

So our stories continue.

The lights in the church are turned on; the timing dependent on the pastor.

The next part is the beginning of the Easter mass.

The Gospel tells of the empty tomb and the risen Christ.

If there are baptisms of children or adults choosing to enter the Church (catechumens) their initiation would take place now – Baptism and Confirmation completed by sharing in the Eucharist for the first time.

If not, the presider blesses the water with the Easter Candle, there is a renewal of Baptismal promises and profession of faith, reminding us of our origins as a Catholic and the faith that we believe and live.

This is a joyful mass, celebrating Christ's resurrection, God's fulfillment of a promise of life after death at which we sing our "Alleluia's" – "praise God".

We fulfill our duty to attend Sunday mass at the Easter Vigil, but many people choose to attend mass on Easter morning as well.

The Easter season does not end here. It is the longest liturgical season of the Church and extends to Pentecost, the 50th day after Easter.