

TRIDUUM

A Sense of the Season

The word *Triduum* comes from the Latin and means “three days.” It is commonly pronounced “Tri-doo-uhm” and is usually used in reference to the Easter Triduum, the three most sacred days in the church year. The Easter Triduum begins with the evening mass of the Lord’s Supper on Holy Thursday, reaches its high point at the Easter Vigil and concludes with evening prayer on Easter Sunday. Often there is confusion about how that block of time can be counted as three days. The traditional Jewish practice of counting days from sunset to sunset is used during the Triduum. Thus, Holy Thursday evening to Good Friday evening is the first day. Good Friday evening to Holy Saturday evening is the second day and Holy Saturday evening to Sunday evening is the third day. After centuries of neglect, Pope Pius XII in 1955 restored the Triduum liturgies to their rightful place as the culmination of the entire liturgical year.

Although we talk of the three days, our Triduum prayer is best understood as one liturgy in three interlocking movements. The death and resurrection of the Lord cannot be separated. The meaning of these days is distorted when we imagine that the liturgy re-enacts the final events in the life of Jesus in a sort of historical review. We miss the point in that case. The mystery of Jesus’ death and resurrection is a present reality; the boundaries of time, and the boundaries of death, have no power here.

Our past, present and future are irrevocably marked by our own immersion into this mystery through baptism. We wash one another’s feet, reverence the cross, light fires in the night and proclaim the stories of our salvation with an awed awareness that This is what it means to be baptized. The Easter Vigil then is the premier time to welcome new members into the church through baptism, confirmation and Eucharist.

Ideally, no other parish events are scheduled on these three days; the presence, time and energy of every person in the community are needed for what we do here. Yes, this may be inconvenient, but birth and death are rarely convenient! Our forty days of prayer, fasting and almsgiving lead us to the Triduum—beyond its history, into its mystery.

Copyright © 1997 Archdiocese of Chicago; Liturgy Training Publications. Text by Kathy Luty. Used with permission. Reprinted under OneLicense.net A-703473