

Why I Am Catholic

Holy Week

No other church or denomination celebrates Holy Week with the same reverence, joy, or style of worship. Others incorporate elements of what the Catholic Church does, but not all the things that combine to give us the full sense or complete experience of this sacred time.

We enter into Holy Week this day as we celebrate Palm Sunday. We remember the day our Lord entered into Jerusalem as the people waved palm branches and spread "their cloaks on the road." (Lk 19:36) Then we see the profound contrast—the turn of events that leads to the cross on Good Friday.

On Thursday night, we celebrate the Last Supper. At every mass we celebrate the Last Supper, but this time is different. We journey with the apostles through the washing of feet, the institution of the priesthood and the Eucharist, and the procession to the altar of repose which is our Garden of Gethsemane.

On Good Friday, we see the cost of sin and the love of God. At NOON we gather to reflect on Christ's Seven Last Words (Seven Last Sayings). At 3:00 p.m., we will have a simply presentation of the Stations of the Cross in the church. At 5:00 p.m., we have a Living Way of the Cross at the Fairgrounds, a living drama that helps us to enter into the Scriptures in a powerful, moving way. At 7:00 p.m., we have the most solemn service of the day—The Veneration of the Cross and our prayers for a world in need.

Holy Saturday is a day of waiting. It is the day the Church historically remembers Christ's Descent into Hell. Before the Crucifixion and Resurrection, humans had not made a choice for or against Christ. On that day, those in the "waiting room"—those who had died—made their choice for or against Christ, for Heaven or for Hell. Saturday night we celebrate our choice for Christ and we welcome new members to the faith.

It is the longest and most beautiful mass of the year. We begin in darkness and rejoice as the Easter candle—the light of Christ—is lit from the Easter fire. We spend extra time listening to our story of salvation told in the Scriptures. We then celebrate the sacraments of initiation and renew our own baptismal promises. The Holy Saturday Eucharist is the high point of the Church year and brings us to a deeper faith as we cry "Amen" ("I believe").

Easter Sunday is the exclamation point! It is the day of triumph and the remembrance that Jesus overcomes even sin and death to bring us back to life. For some, Christmastime is more special, but Easter is the highest feast. It is easier to celebrate and to grasp the meaning of the birth of a baby than to enter into death and rise with Christ. Death and resurrection are much more mysterious and much more difficult for us to understand and accept. At the end Christmas must be seen through the eyes of Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Jesus came into the world to die and to rise again. And He does so for us.

"The mystery of the Resurrection, in which Christ crushed death, permeates with its powerful energy our old time, until all is subjected to him." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1169) "Beginning with the Easter Triduum as its source of light, the new age of the Resurrection fills the whole liturgical year with its brilliance." (1168)

