

HOLY SATURDAY

Focus THIS DAY'S FOCUS

Our Triduum journey has taken us from foot washing to veneration, from the Last Supper to the Crucifixion. Today we move closer to the Resurrection. We continue to put aside food, work, and other distractions to make room for prayer and reflection.

These past days we heard the story of Jesus's Crucifixion: his betrayal by Peter in the Garden at Gethesemane, his trial before Pilate, and finally his Crucifixion and death upon the cross. Those events led the disciples to complete despair. All they had hoped for was lost, along with their dear friend and Lord. But when they went to the tomb to prepare the body for burial, it was not there! Jesus had risen. The Resurrection is about rich new life springing forth where before there was death, despair, and hopelessness.

Take time for quiet today, to read and reflect on the Scriptures and offer prayers for those who will be baptized, confirmed, and received into the full communion of the Church. The Holy Saturday liturgy is a long one, so be sure you are well rested!

Taken from *The Great Three Days*, by Tony Alonso.
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SERVICE THE SERVICE OF LIGHT

The Holy Saturday liturgy begins without a greeting or song. We begin outside in the dark. And because it is dark, we light a fire. If you have ever been to a traditional evening prayer service, you know that it always begins with the lighting of a candle. The gathering around the fire is similar to that.

The fire and the light it provides represent Christ, the one true light. We bless the fire, and we light the Paschal candle from it (*Paschal* is another word for *Easter*). The Paschal candle is large and colorful with various symbols on it. Try to look at it up close and explore the symbols. The light of the Paschal candle leads us into the dark church. When everyone is gathered in the church, the Paschal candle is raised high three times as the presider sings “Christ our Light” and all respond, “Thanks be to God” (*Sacramentary*, page 173). Then the light is shared with everyone in the church. Candles that were handed out to everyone before the liturgy are lit from this one candle, and the whole church lights up with the light of Christ.

When everyone has received their light, it is time for one of the Easter Vigil’s most ancient and beautiful prayers, the “Exsultet” (which means “exultation”). It is a song of thanksgiving, similar to the Eucharistic prayer we pray at each Mass. In the “Exsultet,” we bless the candle and give thanks to God. “This is the night . . .” These four words ring out again and again, reminding us that this is our Passover feast. You may remember that Pass-over is the Jewish commemoration of the Jews’ freedom from slavery in Ancient Egypt. The Easter Vigil is our Christian Passover: Christ frees us from death through his Resurrection. *This is the night!*

After the “Exsultet,” we blow out our candles and the vigil continues with the liturgy of the word. Just as light has tremendous power, so does darkness. The darkness reminds us that the night of the Easter Vigil is different from any other night. The darkness we experience tonight isn’t just about waiting for light, as if darkness is bad. After all, darkness can be as powerful as light. But, it is about setting this night apart and, especially, hearing these Scriptures. Think of your experiences of darkness. How do you think darkness will affect how you hear the Scriptures tonight?



GOSPEL

- **YEAR A:** Matthew 28:1–10
- **YEAR B:** Mark 16:1–7
- **YEAR C:** Luke 24:1–12

The Resurrection story tells of the empty tomb, when the world was turned upside down and death itself was conquered by Christ's Resurrection. Of all the stories we hear on Holy Saturday, this is the story of God's greatest fulfillment of his promise to us: new life from the dead. Our lives are full of deaths and resurrections, aren't they? Yet in all of it, God has not left us. God's presence is always with us, closer than our own breathing. Nothing can separate us from the love of God or the compassion of Jesus. When you think a situation is hopeless, that no end is in sight, that evil is winning out, remember the Resurrection story. It is proof that despair and death do not win.

BAPTISM

LITURGY OF BAPTISM



LITANY OF THE SAINTS

After the homily, we journey to the baptismal font, where the elect will be baptized. This is a journey we have been on all through Lent and especially over the last three days. On our journey to the font, we sing the Litany of the Saints. In this ancient chant, the cantor calls out saints' names, and all respond, "Pray for us." We call upon the saints because they have walked this journey before us. We pray that they offer the elect strength on their baptismal journey. We also relight our candles from the Paschal candle, which leads the way to the font. Christ, our light, leads the way.

BAPTISM

Why do you think water is such a powerful symbol for Baptism? Think about your experiences with water for a moment. What comes to mind? Water is death-dealing and life-giving. We use water in Baptism because Baptism is also about death and life—death to sin that separates us from God and the birth of a new life in the Holy Spirit.

At the font, the water is blessed and the elect come forward to renounce sin and profess their faith. Then the presider pours water over each of the elect and says, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (*The Rites of the Catholic Church*, number 226). Following each Baptism, everyone sings an acclamation of support and celebration. When all the elect have been baptized, the entire assembly renews their baptismal promises, and everyone is sprinkled with holy water. This water reminds us again of our own Baptism.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

The next part of the initiation rites is to welcome those who have been previously baptized and who have been preparing for reception into full communion with the Catholic Church. They profess their faith before the assembly, and the presider welcomes them into the Church’s communion. At Communion tonight, they receive the Eucharist for the first time.

CONFIRMATION

The neophytes (a fancy word for “newly baptized”) and newly received who are to be confirmed come forward at this time. If babies or young children were baptized, they are not confirmed, but all others are. The presider goes to each one of them, lays his hands on their head, and prays silently. Then he anoints each of them with chrism on the forehead. Recall that this chrism was blessed earlier in the Triduum at the Chrism Mass and was presented at the beginning of the Holy Thursday Mass.

Following the initiation of new members, the liturgy proceeds as a normal Mass would, with intercessions and the liturgy of the Eucharist. But there is one big difference tonight: for the first time, all those received into the Church join us for the rest of the Mass. Until this moment, they have always been dismissed before the intercessions. This is an important moment for all of them and for the entire community—a celebration indeed!