

REFLECTION FOR REFLECTION

Good Friday is filled with rich images, including a barren altar, a wooden cross, the smell of incense burning, and silence, just to name a few. Think about Good Friday liturgies you have celebrated throughout your life. Write down some of the images, smells, and sounds that come to mind.

- † **What distractions might you need to rid yourself of to fully immerse yourself in the meaning of this day?**

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The Good Friday liturgy includes a commemoration of Jesus's death that is more than a mere re-enactment; the liturgy calls us to enter into the mystery of Jesus's death.

At the Good Friday liturgy, we reflect on the Passion and death of Jesus through prayer, song, and silent reflection. We take time to listen to the story of Christ's Passion, venerate the cross, and offer special prayers of intercession for the whole world. On Good Friday, the environment of the church is stark: any decoration is removed, holy water is removed from the font, and the altar is stripped. The church is a model of how we should approach this sacred day: without distraction.

GATHERING

The Good Friday liturgy begins quietly, picking up where Holy Thursday left off. Because the Triduum began last night, there is no procession or gathering song. Instead, the presider and other ministers are seated in their places before the liturgy. When it is time to begin, the entire assembly kneels in quiet reverence. As the assembly kneels, the presider and other ministers may lie prostrate (face down, in humility and adoration) on the ground. Prostration is a posture of great reverence. In your reflection and prayer time today, prepare for this brief silent moment in the liturgy by reflecting on all you need to "lay down" and offer to God.

SCRIPTURES THE SCRIPTURES

In preparation for the Good Friday liturgy, take some time to read and reflect on the Scriptures. You may choose to read just the Gospel, some of the readings, or all four readings. When you have finished reading, take a brief moment to sit in silence. Then write down some of the key words, phrases, or images that stay with you. Then read the Scriptures again, with these questions in mind:

- † **What insights can you take from this reading?**
- † **What does this passage call you to pray for?**
- † **How are you being challenged to live out this passage?**

After you've had some time to read, journal, and pray over the Scriptures, consider reading the reflections that follow the listed passages. The reflections will help deepen your understanding of those passages.

† **FIRST READING: Isaiah 52:13—53:12**

This reading, known as the song of the suffering servant, is one of the four servant songs in the Book of Isaiah. The servant songs describe qualities of a true servant leader. Early followers of Jesus found meaning in this passage as a way to understand the suffering and Crucifixion of Jesus. As you listen to this passage, think about the similarities between the suffering servant and the suffering Jesus. The most important similarity is that in both passages, suffering is ultimately seen as a victory.



PSALM: Psalm 31:2,6,12–13,15–16,17,25

This psalm helps unify all of today's Scriptures. There is an especially strong connection between this psalm and John's Passion, which we hear at the Good Friday liturgy: Jesus finds trust and salvation even amidst suffering. Ultimately, his trust in and obedience to his Father become his and our salvation.



SECOND READING: Hebrews 4:14–16; 5:7–9

This Scripture passage is a reflection on the meaning of Christ's suffering and death. Jesus's obedience to death is celebrated as salvation for him and for us. This passage has both a tone of confidence ("Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness" [verse 16]) and a tone of challenge to obedience ("He was heard because of his reverent submission" [verse 7]). In your own life, how can you approach God boldly and obediently at the same time?

**GOSPEL: John 18:1—19:42**

Whenever we read or listen to any of the four Passion Gospels, we must take note of the differences between them. Each has different details and a different emphasis reflective of the person who wrote it and the way his community viewed the Passion. Keep that in mind as you hear the Passion according to John proclaimed at the Good Friday liturgy.

John emphasizes Jesus's obedience and that he is in control of his journey to the cross. John doesn't paint an image of mourning and sadness; instead, he paints an image of Jesus victorious on the cross. Like the first and second readings and the psalm, this reading emphasizes Jesus's trust in God. Rather than showing Jesus as a helpless victim, John's Passion Gospel shows Jesus fulfilling his own promise: "I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord" (10:17–18). Think about what you can learn from Jesus about putting your trust in God.

DISMISSAL OF THE ELECT

Before the intercessions, the elect (see the introduction) are again dismissed from the assembly because the Church considers the job of interceding to be a very important one, as something reserved for the baptized. Because the elect are dismissed before the veneration, they usually come back with their leader later in the day to venerate the cross together.

INTERCESSIONS

On Good Friday, we pray the intercessions in a more elaborate way than usual. We take our time to pray for the needs of the whole world: the Church, the Pope, the clergy and lay people of the Church, those preparing for the Easter sacraments, other Christians, the Jewish people, other non-Christians, those who do not believe in God, those who serve in public office, the sick, the suffering and the dying. These prayers, and their style, are perhaps the oldest liturgical ritual we have. They link us to the prayer of our sisters and brothers down through the centuries. They also give us a sense of our long tradition of public prayer. First, the reader announces the intention. Together we all offer that intention with a sung or spoken acclamation followed by silent prayer. Then the presider speaks a prayer, first praising God and naming how God has been loving and caring for the person or need we present, then asking for a particular grace. We affirm that prayer with our “Amen.”

You can prepare for these great intercessions by offering your own prayers throughout the day for each person and need that will be addressed in the evening liturgy.

† **Those who need my prayers include . . .**

† **I offer my prayers especially for . . .**

THE CROSS

THE SHOWING AND VENERATION OF THE CROSS

The showing and veneration of the cross is the high point of the Good Friday liturgy. After the intercessions, the cross is brought in solemn procession into the midst of the assembly. Those carrying the cross stop three times to lift it up. Each time, the presider sings, “This is the wood of the cross, on which hung the Savior of the world,” and everyone responds “Come, let us worship” (*Sacramentary*, page 157). After each showing, there is a period of silent reflection. In some churches, each time the cross is raised, all kneel in reverence.

After the cross has been raised three times and placed on or near the altar, the whole assembly is invited to venerate, or reverence, the cross. In the same spirit of humbleness that Jesus showed in handing himself over to God, we approach the cross and bow to it, kiss it, touch it, or kneel before it. There is no right or wrong way to venerate the cross. When we venerate the cross, we do not adore the material image but rather what it represents in our lives and in our world.

COMMUNION

The liturgy ends very simply, with the sharing of Communion. The Communion we receive on Good Friday is the bread consecrated at Holy Thursday’s liturgy. Following Communion, the liturgy ends quietly, flowing into the Easter Vigil’s great celebration of the Resurrection.

PASCHAL FAST

THE PASCHAL FAST CONTINUES

The Easter fast, which began after the Holy Thursday liturgy, continues through Good Friday and ends after the Easter Vigil liturgy. Remember that this is not a fast of sacrifice but one of anticipation. The idea is not to starve yourself or make yourself miserable during these holy days but to make some extra room for God! Try to fast from television and other distractions and make extra time for prayer. Throughout the remainder of the evening and into the morning and afternoon of Holy Saturday, remember the suffering Christ in the eyes of the homeless, of victims of war and violence, of abused children, of the elderly, and of those on death row in our prisons. Recall and pray for those whom we have excluded from our churches and communities, those who have been stripped of all human dignity, those who long to feel love and acceptance.