

A Journey to New Life in Christ

Kathy Kuczka

Each procession during Holy Week has a different tone and solemnity. On Palm Sunday, the faithful joyfully sing *hosanna*. After the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday, the mood is somber as the journey is made to the altar of repose. On Good Friday, the community quietly processes to reverence the cross. Hope fills the community at the Easter Vigil as they sing "Thanks be to God," while following the minister carrying the Paschal candle and singing "The Light of Christ." These processions help us to journey with Christ into solitude and surrender, into desertion and death, resurrection and new life.

PALM SUNDAY

The procession on Palm Sunday is modeled after the ancient liturgies of Jerusalem. The fourth-century pilgrim known as Egeria wrote that the Palm Sunday procession began at the Mount of Olives and ended at the city gates. Today, the faithful gather in a place other than inside the church so that a fitting procession to the church can take place. After palm, olive, or other branches are blessed and sprinkled with holy water, the Gospel account of Jesus' triumphant journey to Jerusalem is proclaimed. The procession into the church that follows is joyous, with incense rising from a swinging thurible, servers carrying a cross decorated with palms and candles, and the faithful singing and acclaiming Christ as King. The entrance procession propels the community to enter the heart of the Paschal Mystery.

HOLY THURSDAY

At the end of the liturgy during the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper, the faithful will follow the priest in procession as he brings the Blessed Sacrament from the altar to a place of repose. This is not an ordinary procession. It begins after the priest has incensed the Eucharist, continues with the faithful singing "Pange, Lingua" or another Eucharistic hymn, and ends with silent adoration. This procession symbolizes the community's journey with Jesus as he moves closer to his passion and death.



In the procession into the church on Holy Saturday, the faithful follow Christ our light into new life.

GOOD FRIDAY

On Good Friday, the community gathers to remember the death of the Lord but with faith and hope of resurrection. This liturgy includes the ancient ritual of the veneration of the cross. According to Egeria, the community gathered at Golgotha to venerate the relics of the true cross that had recently been discovered in Jerusalem. People revered the wood by touching it with their foreheads and by kissing it. The community is invited to revere the cross as in ancient Jerusalem, with a touch or a kiss, signs that our whole bodies are immersed in the dying of Christ.

HOLY SATURDAY

At the Easter Vigil, our prayer begins in the dark. Gathered around a blazing fire, we see who we truly are, the beloved of God. After the blessing of the fire, the community processes behind the Paschal candle, sign of the Risen Lord, responding three times, "Thanks be to God" to the deacon's "The Light of Christ." These three stations echo those of the cross at the Good Friday liturgy. The cross and the candle are symbols of our salvation. On this night, the community follows Christ our light into new life.

Before the baptismal liturgy, the holy women and men who have gone before us are recalled during the Litany of the Saints, and those who are to be baptized process to the font with their godparents. The singing of the litany is a sign of the throngs of people who have experienced the journey through the Paschal Mystery.

Our liturgical processions do more than move us from one point to another. They help identify who we are and whose we are. During Holy Week, our processions help us experience in our bodies a movement of dying and rising with Christ. To process with the community is to remind ourselves that we do not travel this journey alone. With this assurance, we, like the women at the tomb, can run with the news, telling the world of God's great love.