



On Palm Sunday, the sound system must accommodate both those gathered outside prior to the procession and the people in the pews.

The Processions of Holy Week: A Journey with the Paschal Mystery

Vicki Klima

Everything we do and everything we say in the liturgy aims to give thanks and praise to God. All that we experience has the potential to bring about holiness in the participants because the liturgy teaches us about our attitudes and actions outside of the liturgy.

From the liturgy, therefore, particularly the Eucharist, grace is poured forth upon us as from a fountain; “the liturgy is the source for achieving in the most effective way possible human sanctification and God’s glorification, the end to which all the Church’s other activities are directed” (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, 10).

What we do in the liturgy matters, and the way we do it matters.

The actions within the liturgy are not removed from our daily life. The ordinary practices of telling a story and sharing a meal become extraordinary in the ritual of the Mass. Processions, which play a part in our daily routines, enrich the movements in the liturgy. Processions take varied forms during our lives. Parades celebrate important people or occasions, and protest marches signify a commitment to a cause. A procession of cars moves from the church to the cemetery, stopping other traffic on the way. At banks, theaters, and at airport secu-

rity, people wait in line and process through stanchions in an orderly manner.

Catholics consider themselves a pilgrim people on a journey, and processions have always been a large part of our ritual history. While processions have the practical purpose of moving people or objects from one place to another, they also enhance the solemnity, or the festivity, of the occasion. Color, movement, music, and the route taken all carry meaning.

Processions are part of most liturgies, if only to move people into and out of the worship space. Godparents and the elect process to the font at Baptisms; confirmands process forward to receive the sacred chrism; the bereaved process with a casket at funerals and at cemeteries. At Sunday Mass, processions occur during the Entrance, the Gospel, the bringing of the gifts to the altar, Communion, and, in most churches, at the conclusion. Let’s briefly look at these weekly processions before we examine the ones in our Holy Week liturgies.

PROCESSIONS AT SUNDAY MASS

Entrance Rites

The procession at the beginning of Mass brings the ministers to their places in the sanctuary. It might seem that it would be more sensible for the ministers to walk the few feet from the sacristy to the presider’s chair, but this procession usually begins in the narthex and goes through the church. The procession leader

(crossbearer) carries a crucifix, reminding the assembly of the reason they are present, and that daily they are renewing their commitment to follow the cross of Christ. Usually, there are candlebearers, and the Book of the Gospels is carried by the deacon or a reader. According to parish custom, various liturgical ministers may take part in this procession. The people in the pews are being gathered together as the people in the procession walk by. The assembly puts aside concerns and distractions and join in a song that reflects the season of the liturgical year or helps focus them on praising God.

Gospel Procession

Again, a great distance may not exist between the ambo and the presider's or deacon's chair, and this factor may influence how elaborate the procession is. In most cases, the Book of the Gospels has been placed on the altar and needs to be carried to the ambo during the singing of the acclamation. Some parish churches take the long way around the sanctuary to get from the altar to the ambo in order to extend the festivity. In any case, the music accompanying the singing of the Gospel Acclamation should continue until the presider or deacon is ready to incense the Gospel text or proclaim the Gospel.

Procession of Catechumens

There may be a procession of catechumens sent forth from the Mass to break open the Word of God. It is appropriate for music or the singing of a short refrain to accompany this procession. When the same refrain is sung every week, the assembly will recall what is occurring.

Procession with the Gifts

Members of the assembly bring gifts of bread and wine to the altar. Again, the pragmatic method would be for a table to be near the altar and for the priest or servers to bring the gifts to the altar. The act of parishioners bringing forward gifts from the nave says that these gifts come from the parish. Parishioners may no longer grow wheat and grapes on their land, but their work has provided the money from which the parish has purchased these items. They are gifts the assembly has supplied, and the members carrying them forward represent all who are present. Some parishes time the collection of money so that it also may be brought forward with the bread and wine.

Communion

The Communion procession is a necessary method of distributing the Body and Blood of Christ to large numbers of people. Catholics do not have the tradition of passing a tray as do some communities. The ritual gesture of reverence that accompanies reception of Communion is a fairly recent addition to our ritual. Though people bow the head at various times in this procession, it works best for the bow to be made just before receiving the Body and Blood of Christ.

Concluding Procession

A concluding procession or recessional is not indicated in *The Roman Missal* (RM), but somehow the ministers have to leave the sanctuary (Order of Mass, 145). Most parishes have found



Candles are lighted from the Paschal candle after it has been raised up a second time during the procession on the Easter Vigil.

that a concluding song that sends the people into the week makes sense here.

Music Comment

During any procession, the music needs to continue until the ritual action has concluded. If the song or acclamation has ended, someone, most likely the keyboardist, is required to improvise to continue the music. The music should not end, for example, while the presider is still five feet from the ambo or there is any other indication that all involved have not reached assigned places.

THE PROCESSIONS OF HOLY WEEK

While considering the processions of Palm Sunday and the Sacred Paschal Triduum, it will be helpful to reread the rubrics in the Missal and to read the 1988 document *On Preparing and Celebrating the Paschal Feasts (Paschale solemnitatis [PS])*. The rubrics and *Paschale solemnitatis* provide what is required and what is optional, and remind us of what the Church intends in these celebrations.

The liturgies of Holy Week do not reenact Jesus' life. The priest does not need to ride a donkey into church on Palm Sunday. Twelve men are not required for the footwashing at the Last Supper. An empty tomb does not need to be built. Most of all, the community doesn't pretend that they do not know the end of the story. The events of Jesus' life, death, and Resurrection are celebrated as part of the Paschal Mystery. The participants in the liturgy ask, "What do these past events mean in our lives today?" Today is not the same as one year ago because another year of experiences and growth have occurred. All assembled have changed, and the Church issues an invitation to grapple

again with the age-old concepts of sin and redemption, of life and death, of life after death.

Pastoral ministers should decide which liturgies are in need of rehearsals and schedule them. Keep in mind that memories dim when much time has lapsed between the rehearsal and the liturgy. Should the liturgist also be the musician at these liturgies, another person should direct the rehearsals. Be prepared that not all participants, including the presider, will show up. Cue in leaders for a dry run at a convenient time. Then learn to accept a bit of chaos at the event. The messiness is part of the prayer. Also, communicate with ushers/greeters so they will not need to make assumptions about ways to be helpful (for instance, lighting the congregation's candles at the Easter Vigil from a lighter). Remember to recruit as many helpers as needed so that everything doesn't rest on the shoulders of a few, and the stress factor is limited.

PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD

The Commemoration of the Lord's Entrance into Jerusalem (Palm Sunday, 2–18)

The logistics of the procession on Palm Sunday depend on the weather, the configuration of the parish property, and the ability to hook up a microphone system, especially when the procession begins in a place outside the main church. It is important that the prayers and texts be heard, as they are essential for the assembly to know what is going on. The Gospel story needs to be heard as we remember Jesus' entry into Jerusalem.

The Roman Missal lists three forms of the entrance rite. The first form, used only before the principle Mass, is the most elaborate and begins outside the church. The priest wears red Mass vestments or a cope. The people carry palm branches.

A ritually astute congregation may want to participate as fully as possible and will cooperate by gathering in a designated area to begin the Mass. Weather permitting, this rite can begin outside, or in a gymnasium or social hall with some effort, but it may be difficult to convince some people to leave their regular pews and walk to another location. Some may not want to participate, and cajoling or making demands on them will not help. For people with disabilities to participate, be sure to think through the logistics. Recruit ushers/greeters to assist people who have difficulty walking.

The sound system needs to be such that people can hear both in the designated setting and in the church. The ritual is straightforward, including the blessing of the palms and the reading of the Gospel account of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. If a deacon is present, he proclaims the Gospel. The palms are sprinkled with holy water for the blessing, so a water vessel and aspergillum (sprinkler) must be available.

After the Gospel, all process into the church. The order of the procession is an incense bearer, a cross bearer flanked by two candlebearers, the deacon carrying the Book of the Gospels, the priest and any other servers, and then the people carrying their palm branches.

Coordinating singing during the procession with singing once the first people enter the church can be a problem. Often it is difficult to keep voices together, but it may help to spread choir

members throughout the procession. A repeated refrain can be easier than a hymn. At a given signal, the organist could begin an Entrance hymn such as "All Glory, Laud, and Honor" to which the people in the procession would join as they enter the church.

The logistics of moving so many people into the church needs to be considered. Can multiple doors be used? Don't try to walk single or double file. This movement is going to take some time.

After everyone is in place, the presider prays the Collect and then moves into the Liturgy of the Word, omitting the other usual entrance rites.

The second form is the Solemn Entrance and may be repeated at more than one Mass. It includes the same ritual components but occurs inside the church. The participants in this procession would be the same as during a regular parish Mass entrance procession along with a "representative group of the faithful" (14). This group could be formed through an announcement just before Mass asking for people to meet where the procession will begin. Or the group could be formed beforehand with members of a youth group, parish council, or another parish group or committee.

Another issue is that of a disembodied voice coming through the sound system, with people unaware of the location of the presider and other ministers. If your parish works with projection, it might be possible for the speaker to be viewed on a screen. If not, an announcement should be made—for example, asking people to turn toward the narthex or cluing them in about this uncommon way for Mass to begin. (This problem could occur in the first form as well if some people have remained in church). In any procession, it is a good practice to think through sightlines. Consider what people need to see, and what they will see.

The third form, the Simple Entrance, follows a regular Mass format with the use of the Entrance Antiphon for the day or another related song calling to mind Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. *The Roman Missal* states that if one of the first two forms is not used, then a Word celebration on the entrance into Jerusalem and the Passion be held. People expect to receive palms, have them blessed, and hear the Palm Sunday Gospel along with singing "Hosannas," so it is advisable not follow this third form unless limited resources make it the best option.

THURSDAY OF THE LORD'S SUPPER AT THE EVENING MASS

The Transfer of the Most Blessed Sacrament (Thursday of the Lord's Supper, 37–44)

Liturgical documents have specific instructions for the ritual action of the Transfer of the Most Blessed Sacrament at the end of the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper. The directives include how the destination area should and should not appear. The place of repose should be a tabernacle or pyx. A monstrance may not be used. If a Good Friday service with Communion will not be held at the church, the transfer of the Eucharist does not take place. The undistributed Eucharist consecrated at the Holy Thursday Mass is being reserved for the Communion Rite in the Good Friday service.



Photo © John Zich

At the Transfer of the Most Blessed Sacrament on Holy Thursday, a minister carrying a smoking thurible precedes the priest, who wears a humeral veil and carries the Eucharist.

The Blessed Sacrament, in a suitable vessel, is left on the altar after the distribution of Communion. The Prayer after Communion is prayed. The priest kneels and incenses the Eucharist three times. The procession to the place of repose is led by a crossbearer flanked by two candlebearers. The rubrics simply state: “Others carrying lighted candles follow.” They are next followed by a person with a smoking thurible and the priest, who wears the humeral veil and carries the Eucharist. I have been at churches where everyone is invited to be part of the procession and places where the congregation waits in the church. The people may then leave the church or go to the designated place for private prayer.

At the place of repose, the priest places the vessel in the tabernacle with the door open, and he incenses the Eucharist. If a deacon is present, he assists as needed. Then the priest closes the door of the tabernacle.

Traditionally, the “Pange Lingua” is sung during this procession. This hymn proclaims our Eucharistic theology and carries the weight of tradition on this night. Even parishes that do not often include chant in their repertoire will find that the hymn adds to the solemnity of the night. Some parishes sing the first verse in Latin and then sing the verse again in English followed by the singing of the rest of the hymn in English. The final two verses (“Tantum Ergo”) are sung after the repose of the Eucharist.

FRIDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD / CELEBRATION OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD

The Adoration of the Holy Cross (Friday of the Passion of the Lord, 14–21)

What cross is used on Good Friday? I have seen many types of crosses used. One church takes down the cross that hangs from the ceiling over the altar and uses that cross on Good Friday. Some parishes have made a large wooden cross for the adoration. The documents say “cross,” and so a crucifix is not required. The cross is to be “of appropriate size and beauty” (PS, 68).

There are two forms for the Showing of the Holy Cross on Good Friday. In the first form, a deacon, accompanied by two candlebearers, brings a covered cross from the sacristy to the middle of the sanctuary. The cross is covered by a violet cloth. The priest uncovers the cross in three sections, each followed by singing the acclamation texts. The priest, deacon, or choir sings the acclamations. After each acclamation, all kneel while the priest holds the cross aloft for a time of adoration. This action would have implications for the size and weight of the cross unless others are helping the priest lift the cross.

In the second form, an uncovered cross is carried from the church’s entrance to the sanctuary. Candlebearers are included in this procession. A specific number of candles is not given. Three times during the procession everyone stops, the cross is

lifted high, and the acclamations are sung. A brief time of adoration follows each acclamation.

The cross is taken to the “entrance of the sanctuary or another suitable place” (Friday of the Passion of the Lord, 17). It is not put in a stand but is held by as many ministers as necessary. The cross is flanked by two candles. Make certain the candles are far enough removed so as not to be in the way of the veneration.

Only one cross is to be presented for the adoration, which could increase the time needed for the assembly to reverence the cross. If a life-size wooden cross is used, however, at least two people can venerate at the same time. In fact, a large cross held on its side can be available for someone who wants to kneel and kiss the cross and for someone who cannot manage to kneel and who stands by the cross to bow, touch, or kiss the cross. Be sure to think through the logistics. Can someone in a wheelchair reach a part of the cross?

A number of chants and antiphons are given for the period of veneration, but it is also possible to use “other suitable chants.”

There is a provision for adoration without coming forward in a procession to the cross. The cross is lifted up and adored in silence. Eliminating individual adoration seems extreme, unless there are severe time constraints or the congregation includes a large number of people with mobility issues. Being able to touch the cross is an important element of the Good Friday service. If the issue is time restrictions, the parish might consider ending the prayer and then inviting those who have more time to come forward to venerate individually.

After the adoration is concluded, the cross is posted in the sanctuary. Candles are positioned at the altar or near the cross.

THE EASTER VIGIL IN THE HOLY NIGHT

The Easter Vigil is called the “mother of all Vigils” (Easter Vigil, 20), because it is the culmination of our Lenten prayers and practices, includes our most cherished symbols, welcomes new members into the Church, and gives the faithful an opportunity to publicly renew their baptismal promises.

Procession with the Easter Candle (Easter Vigil, 8–19)

The first procession at the Easter Vigil begins with the blessing of the new fire and preparation of the Paschal candle. Since this usually occurs outside the church, which might be the best place for a fire, some people may not want to leave their pews, so similar logistical problems as on Palm Sunday could occur. Again, consider what people are able to see and hear when preparing this ritual action.

Once the candle is prepared and lit, a thurifer leads the deacon or other minister, who carries the Paschal candle to the sanctuary in the darkened church. The glow of this candle pierces the darkness of the night. It is Christ bringing light into the darkness of sin and death, bringing illumination into the world. The potency of this symbol is tied into beginning the Easter Vigil after sunset.



The cross used for the Adoration of the Cross is to be of appropriate size and beauty. The procession should provide space for each person to touch the cross.

The procession stops three times for the candle to be lifted up and the acclamations sung. When it is lifted the first time, the priest lights his candle from it, and after the second time, the Easter candle is used to light the smaller candles held by the other ministers and the congregation. The procession is in silence except for the acclamations. I have had good experience with random handbell ringing between the acclamations, especially with a long center aisle and a large congregation.

The candle is placed in a stand near the ambo. If a deacon is singing the Exsultet, he first receives the blessing from the priest and incenses the book and the candle. The Exsultet may be sung by another priest or a lay person (Easter Vigil, 19). Choose the person best able to proclaim this significant text with vocal ease and high-quality diction. The Easter Proclamation is a poetic song of praise giving God thanks for our salvation.

After the Exsultet, the Mass continues with the Liturgy of the Word.

Procession to the Font at the Easter Vigil (Easter Vigil, 37–43)

To view all of the options for the Baptismal Liturgy, it is important to read the pertinent sections of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*.

The baptismal rite takes place at the font. The candidates may be called directly to the font. If a procession to the font will take place, then the candidates are called forward along with their godparents. The procession is led by a minister carrying the Paschal candle. Next the candidates and sponsors are followed by the priest and any assisting ministers (acolytes). The Litany of Saints is sung during this procession. All of the saints are called upon to pray for these people who are about to be baptized.

If the font is in or near the sanctuary, it is permissible for the procession not to be extended. A pastoral decision will need to be made about the value of creating a longer procession to the font rather than walking the shortest distance between two points. The elect have been part of a lengthy journey with the



Photo by Karen Callaway © LTP

The seating of the newly initiated can ensure that they will be the first in the procession to receive Communion.

font as an important destination. Does a procession enhance the moment, or is it unwarranted?

The rubrics explicitly call for good sight lines at the font for the congregation. Since it may be impossible to follow this direction, the rubrics include the provision for bringing a vessel of water to the sanctuary instead of using the font. Think through what it means to omit use of the font. Do there need to be discussions about a long-range plan for the placement of the font and its relationship to the congregation for future Easter Vigils?

If using the Combined Rite at the Easter Vigil of the Sacraments of Initiation and of the Rite of Reception into Full Communion of the Catholic Church (RCIA, 562–594), read all of the rubrics in the ritual book and think through the choreography of the entire rite. Keeping the actions and people separated, as called for by the Combined Rite, can be a challenge.

Communion Procession at the Easter Vigil (Easter Vigil, 64–66)

The parish most likely will follow the usual procedures for the distribution of Communion under both kinds. However, the neophytes who are receiving their First Eucharist should be at the beginning of the line. This arrangement can easily be achieved by seating them near the front, by what you tell them at a rehearsal, and by recruiting the ushers to direct the line. The rest of the congregation does not need to wait until after the First Communions, especially if the crowd is large. While the neophytes are receiving, members of the assembly can come forward in lines to other ministers.

CONCLUSION

Processions are just one element of the liturgies for Palm Sunday and the Triduum. Our preparations should lead us to look at every text, the music, the environment and liturgical objects, movements, gestures, and posture, silence, and parish traditions/history as preparations are made. What can we do to catechize our young people and our adults on the meaning of what we do and say? In what ways do we welcome the stranger or visitor? How do we invite the congregation to fully participate in the prayer? Are our words and actions giving praise and thanks to God and moving our parishioners along the path to holiness? ♦

VICKI KLIMA is a former director of worship for the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis. She currently ministers at St. Olaf Catholic Church in downtown Minneapolis.

At www.PastoralLiturgy.org

Find and share this article with parish staff and the liturgy committee at the following URL:
<http://pastoralliturgy.org/resources/ProcessionsofHolyWeek.pdf>.