



When care is taken with the details of the liturgy of the Triduum, the assembly will more fully participate.

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A Prayerful Evaluation of the Parish Triduum Celebration

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To ensure that the parish community enters into the Sacred Paschal Triduum with reverence and prayer, pastoral staff and liturgy committees begin their preparation months prior to the Three Days. When care is taken with the details of the holiest liturgy of the year, the assembly is better able to participate in the ritual and song of the celebration of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of the Lord.

After this central act of worship in the life of the community, it is important for those who were instrumental in the preparation of the Triduum to gather soon after Holy Week to reflect on the liturgy of the Three Days. This meeting will be a valuable time for evaluating what went well and what did not go well during the liturgy of the Three Days. It also will be a time to revisit the specifics of the various liturgical actions, to recall if the music served and enhanced the ritual, and to address issues

regarding art and environment, determining whether the worship space was appointed appropriately for each day. Those gathered will also want to revisit the parish's mission of hospitality, especially in light of annual liturgies. As the liturgy of the Three Days is reviewed, the group will see how they can enhance future celebrations of the Triduum.

STEPS FOR AN EFFECTIVE EVALUATION

The first step to an effective evaluation of the liturgy of the Three Days is a written plan that is in place before the parish celebration of the Triduum. This plan, regarded as the template, is held in consensus by those responsible for the liturgy (priests, liturgy directors, music directors, and those involved with the Christian initiation process) and is followed by the ministry coordinators. By engaging in such a process before the Triduum, a healthy setting is created for the evaluation meeting that follows the Three Days. The plan can consist of two components: a script that

describes in detail the order for the liturgy and a checklist that cites all other necessary details that need to be in place prior to the celebration.

The script reflects the rubrics within *The Roman Missal* and other related rites for the Triduum but caters them to the parish by including those considerations that are unique to the local community. Among the considerations that the script takes into account are the particular setting and circumstance of the parish (for example, the architecture) that significantly affects how a ritual is enacted; the logistics that need to be considered regarding processions and other liturgical acts; the selection of music, especially the acclamations of the assembly; and the resources available to each parish. The script indicates how a particular celebration will unfold and allows all those responsible to be aware of and confident in their roles. Though difficult to create the first year, the script is easily adapted and revised for subsequent celebrations and can include all recommendations from an evaluation meeting.

The second part of the plan is a checklist for each day of the Triduum that includes all the requirements, such as the names of each of the ministers assigned to each liturgy, the objects that will be needed, the person or persons who will be charged with the care and placement of those items, specific directions regarding the ritual actions within a liturgy, and, if helpful, a brief description of those actions.

With the two-part plan in place, gather several weeks before the Triduum to discuss details with those responsible for the liturgical ministries. This is not a planning meeting. The general details of preparations would have been attended to well before this gathering. This specific task-oriented meeting is a check-in to clarify who will be responsible for what and to be assured that nothing has been overlooked. It facilitates confidence among all those involved in the role of support for the celebration.

One precaution needs to be addressed once the plan is in place. Since there can be a tendency after many years of preparing such celebrations to only look back at the scripts and checklists of celebrations and to use them as the sole criteria for evaluating current liturgies, the evaluation group must first look to the requirements of the liturgy as they are indicated in the various rites of the Church. Familiarity with the prescribed ritual is necessary. Members of the liturgy committee should be formed over the course of time in the rites and celebrations of the Church. Rather than a one-time formation session, this session is part of an ongoing catechesis that takes place at regular intervals. The person who serves as the chair, whether a volunteer or professional staff member, should be knowledgeable in the rites and celebrations of the Church and be able to communicate those requirements, forming the members of the liturgical committee in *The Roman Missal* and other liturgical documents. Since the Easter Vigil, in particular, often includes the initiation of new members, there must also be familiarity with the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. Of particular significance is the circular letter *Paschale Solemnitatis: On Preparing and Celebrating the Paschal Feasts*. Issued in 1988, this document reminds us of the importance of the days and reiterates norms already in place. The recent decree (*In Missa in Cena*

Domini, January 6, 2016) by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of Sacraments, at the instruction of Pope Francis, affects the celebration of the Washing of the Feet on Holy Thursday and should be taken into account. From these foundational and other sources, the parish ensures that celebrations carry on the tradition of the Church and that the ritual of the Church is appropriately enacted and fleshed out within the particular community.

Members of the parish liturgy committee are central to the preparation and evaluation of these days. The parish director or coordinator of liturgy can serve as the moderator of the committee and of any meetings. If a parishioner holds these responsibilities, that person chairs the meeting. Ideally, the liturgy



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The script for the liturgy of the Three Days will take into account the architecture, setting, and circumstance of the parish that affects how the liturgy is enacted.

committee is composed of the coordinators of each of the liturgical ministries. Sacristans, who are instrumental in caring for the sacred objects and sacramentals of the liturgy, need to be involved in preparing the days of the Triduum in addition to serving as members of a parish liturgy committee. The art and environment team, which oversees the decoration of the church and the significant transformation that it undergoes over the course of the Three Days, needs to be integrated into the process. No ministry is excluded from this process because no one person or ministerial group should work in isolation. The inclusion of all ministries demonstrates the necessity of and respect for each ministry and ensures that the prayer, action, song, and environment will reflect the character of the days from Holy Thursday through the glory of Easter Sunday.

EVALUATING THE TRIDUUM LITURGY

Within two or three weeks after the Triduum, the group that was formed to prepare the liturgies gathers to reflect, evaluate, and look ahead to future celebrations of the Three Days. For this meeting to be fruitful, those involved in the liturgical preparation should converse briefly after each day's liturgy. While memories are fresh, record on the script and checklist any suggestions that should be considered. Since abundant details are part of the preparation, you will not want to rely solely on memories of what occurred during the liturgy. When material is not written down soon after the liturgy, many specific considerations surely will be overlooked between Holy Week and the evaluation meeting.

Begin the evaluation meeting with prayer and reverence for the participants. Offer a prayer of gratitude for the grace of the days, for all those present who worked so diligently in preparation, and for the ministry provided so generously by countless parishioners. Then, before engaging in specific evaluation details, designate time for the group to reflect and share with one another how the liturgies positively affected them. Let individuals speak about the impact of the liturgy, Scripture, music, and ritual actions within their spiritual lives. Allowing the meeting to begin with this time of mystagogy—as pastoral ministers reflect on how they encountered the grace of God within the Triduum—will appropriately frame the remainder of the conversation in a positive manner.

The task of evaluation begins by revisiting each liturgy with scripts, checklists, and written suggestions included as part of the conversation. The ongoing formation of all those responsible, the diligent preparation that took place prior to celebration, the mutually consented plan, and the initial prayer and reflection beginning the meeting helps to create a respectful and productive conversation.

The meeting progresses chronologically through the three days and the group determines what went well and what did not go well by addressing the overall flow and reverence of the liturgies, the assembly's participation, the liturgical actions, the environment and use of the various spaces, and the music. Revisit the liturgies and critique them as a whole ritual entity. Though not comprehensive, the following selected liturgical components of the Triduum, accompanied with questions, can serve as a model for shaping a discussion.



In evaluating the liturgy of the Triduum, the committee will want to consider whether the assembly participated in the music during the transfer of the Blessed Sacrament on Holy Thursday.

EVENING MASS OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

The Preparation of the Gifts

Each Sunday in addition to the regular offering, the assembly may bring forth gifts to assist those in need.¹ On Holy Thursday, this same invitation is given.² The service and charity that is ritualized through the Washing

of the Feet and the calling to God with the needs of the world verbalized in the Universal Prayer, are embodied by the members of the assembly when they bring gifts for the poor in procession. This easily overlooked suggestion in *The Roman Missal* is a clear ritual action shared by the assembly that brings to life the intention of the Washing of the Feet. The singing of *Ubi Caritas*, one of the Missal's rarely suggested chants at the Preparation of the Gifts, clothes the action of the assembly in a most fitting song. Did the parish incorporate the additional ritual action? If so, did its inclusion seem organic or imposed?

How was the procession enacted within the celebration? Was a brief explanation included in the assembly's order of service helping them to connect the Gospel and Mandatum with the procession?

The Transfer of the Most Blessed Sacrament on Holy Thursday

The Roman Missal specifically cites that a lay minister holding a cross, and between two other ministers with lighted candles, leads the procession. Others also carry lighted candles.³ This procession, which moves through the church to the place of reposition or to a separate chapel is envisioned as a large procession leading the assembly to the place and time of vigil keeping. If the parish incorporated a full procession, did it include a wide spectrum of parishioners? Did the community enter into an integrated prayer, with song and procession shared by all, when it engaged this embodied action? Was there an atmosphere of reverence after the procession to the place of reposition or did the assembly begin to engage in casual conversation? Was the place of reposition modestly decorated as suggested and not overly decorated?

GOOD FRIDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD

The Silence at the Beginning

On Good Friday the communal song that normally starts a celebration with the faithful is replaced with communal silence. Did

the entire assembly embrace the silence that is integral to their gathering and the beginning of the Good Friday celebration? If not, what practices might be initiated throughout the year to form the assembly in the value of silence within communal prayer?

The Adoration of the Holy Cross

The Adoration of the Holy Cross can take one of two forms. The architecture of the church, the size of the assembly, and other issues should be considered in the decision regarding how the faithful will adore the cross. The first preference is for individual veneration within a procession. If the assembly is exceedingly large, rather than adding crosses, the assembly reverences the cross in silence while remaining in their places. Regardless of which form is used, *The Roman Missal* stipulates clearly that only one cross is to be venerated by the faithful.⁴ Did the parish arrange the procession so that the preference for individual veneration by individuals did not add too much time to the liturgy? Were possibilities explored that would allow parishioners to come from all areas of the Church for the veneration of one cross? Was the assembly formed in and informed of the different manners in which veneration can be shown to the cross?

The Place for the Blessed Sacrament

After Communion on Good Friday, the Blessed Sacrament is carried to a suitable place outside the church.⁵ For Catholics, the absence of the Blessed Sacrament from the building allows the building itself to express the profound sacrifice that the Church has commemorated. Only if absolutely necessary is the Blessed Sacrament placed back in the tabernacle. It should be possible for every parish to accommodate this directive and find a suitable place to reserve the Blessed Sacrament outside of the church. Did the parish make provisions for a suitable place outside the church for the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament following the Good Friday liturgy? If not, what preparations can be made in the future to accomplish this?

EASTER VIGIL

The Fire

Only under exceptional circumstances should the Easter fire be anything less than grand! The people are to gather around a “blazing fire.”⁶ This fire, seen by the neighbors around the parish property, signifies that something rather spectacular is taking place this night. The blessed fire is not only used to light the Paschal candle, it is even used to light the charcoal for the incense.⁷ Were safety precautions taken, especially if the parish is in a residential area? Were any individuals enlisted as caretakers of the fire? If the parish Easter fire was not blazing, how can this be accomplished in subsequent years?

Lighting the Candles of the Assembly

All are to light their candles from the flame of the Paschal candle.⁸ In this rubric, ritual authenticity and significance take precedence over convenience. Baptized members come to the Paschal candle, and reminiscent of their Baptism, candles are lit from the Paschal candle. The baptized person lights it as a com-



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It should be noted whether the assembly embraced the silence during the liturgy on Good Friday.

mitted member of the Body of Christ. The child of the light reaffirms commitment to Christ the Light. This is a challenging liturgical action to coordinate, but one that engages members of the assembly in a most profound way and allows them to approach the Paschal candle and ritualize their discipleship in Christ. Does the parish enact this ritual, or is the light simply passed from one individual to the next? How would this liturgical moment become more significant for baptized disciples if they were allowed to approach the Paschal candle to light individual candles?

The Liturgy of the Word

While there are provisions made for reducing the number of readings at the Easter Vigil, the proclamation of salvation history is greatly enhanced by the inclusion of all the readings. Care must be taken to engage a forward-moving, yet unrushed rhythm within the sequence of reading, psalm, silence, and prayer if the full scope of readings are proclaimed at the liturgy. It is possible to incorporate this full storytelling within a reasonable amount of time. If only selected readings were proclaimed, what were the criteria used for choosing which readings would be proclaimed at the Easter Vigil? Were the appointed readers able to convey the beauty, depth, and character of each of the readings? If not, should a rehearsal be scheduled in following years? Were the Psalm settings used appropriate in length in relation to the overall sequence of reading, psalm, silence, and prayer?

The Baptismal Liturgy

An important consideration for the baptismal liturgy is the participation of the assembly in witnessing the Baptisms. In some churches there may be an issue with sight lines and the placement of the font. Depending on the number of those gathered, if it is difficult for the members of the assembly to see the ritual, perhaps the faithful could be invited to follow those to be baptized in procession to the font so that all may witness their initiation. Did the assembly sing the Litany of the Saints during the procession to the font? If not, was the setting too challenging to



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The evaluation of the Easter fire should consider both safety and whether the fire was blazing.

be sung during a procession? Were the patron saints of those to be baptized added to the Litany? How could the parish continue to address the full participation of the assembly during the entire baptismal liturgy?

THE GRACE OF AUTHENTIC HOSPITALITY

Hospitality during the Triduum is exercised through a continual awareness and care for all who come to worship at the parish. Those ministries directly responsible for greeting people are obviously instrumental, but other initiatives can add to the overall impact of a hospitable community. Does the parish create orders of service that make it easier for the assembly to enter into these annual celebrations? If not, how is the assembly graciously alerted to and invited into participation in the liturgy? Are parishioners open to assisting visitors who are in an unfamiliar setting? Are persons with special needs able to easily navigate the space? Were extra bulletins printed to accommodate the larger numbers? Did the bulletins contain any information about parish ministries and services that might entice visitors to return? Does the parish staff and liturgy committee make time to reflect on and implement a comprehensive mission of hospitality throughout the year? If so, how is this mission heightened during the Triduum?

One challenging aspect of authentic hospitality during the Triduum is experienced when our churches are overflowing with people on Easter Sunday. Some who fill the church are visitors from other cities and communities and some are parishioners who do not regularly worship with the community. Regardless of the situation, the Church is the home for all the baptized. There are no strangers in the household of God; there are no strangers at the Table of the Lord. A significant challenge for the parish is to present the Church as the dwelling place of all the baptized, even if those celebrating are not parishioners or if they happen to be parishioners who are not regularly present for Eucharist. Gracious and authentic hospitality is always freely given without implying that anyone is an outsider. The ministry of hospitality should embody the characteristics of the father

who welcomed the prodigal son home with no questions and no chastisement.

An effective evaluation of the Triduum is accomplished not only through careful preparation in the weeks prior to the celebration, but in the parish's commitment to form staff members and liturgy committees in the rites and celebrations of the Church. This solid foundation of catechesis and formation among the parish staff, liturgy committee, and liturgical ministries helps to ground the parish in the tradition of the Church's liturgy. Having been formed in the liturgy, those who serve in roles of leadership can then be gathered to prepare the specific details for the Triduum with an awareness and knowledge of how to more authentically shape the celebrations in a manner unique to the particular parish. Following the Triduum, an evaluation process that begins in prayer and gratitude will frame the evaluation's conversations in a spirit of respect. Then the time taken to revisit and critique the details of each celebration can be constructive, productive, and enhance the prayer life of the parish. In all these initiatives, those charged with care for the Church's liturgy as it is enacted in the local community can build on a parish's tradition within the Church's Tradition.

Notes

1. *The Roman Missal* (RM), Order of Mass, 22.
2. RM, Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper, 14.
3. RM, Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper, 38.
4. RM, Good Friday, 19.
5. RM, Good Friday, 29.
6. RM, Easter Vigil in the Holy Night, 8.
7. RM, Easter Vigil in the Holy Night, 15.
8. RM, Easter Vigil in the Holy Night, 16.

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At www.PastoralLiturgy.org

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<http://www.pastoralliturgy.org/resources/APrayerfulCelebrationoftheParishTriduumCelebration.pdf>.