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College students who reported participating in liturgies during Holy Week noted a direct invitation.

Three Days for Transformation Inviting Young People to the Triduum

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Three days. It was three days that affected the entirety of reality in a way that no one, save for the Christ, could foresee. Three days. Three days that changed the world and human history forever. Three days. From a meal among friends on a Thursday night, during which true service of love was modeled; to the darkest of days in which the veil was torn and the earth shook in darkness as God's Son was executed as a political criminal; through the dark, stony cold of the tomb of the Sabbath; culminating with the triumph over death in the glory of Easter Sunday morning. Three days. Three days that have the power to change our communities and our lives for good. Three days that can be transformative for the lives of the youth and young adults in our midst. Three days!

Entering into the fullness of the Paschal Mystery during the Sacred Paschal Triduum is at the crux of our experience as a

Church and as disciples of the Christ. Yet I daresay that it is far too common that these three days are viewed as just another set of days in which individuals go about their regular routines. Sure, the numbers of people in our assemblies swell on the Sundays that bookend the holiest week of the year. But it is the three days of sundown on Holy Thursday through Easter Sunday that are the most important days of our lives of faith each year. The Paschal Triduum of the passion and Resurrection of the Lord has the highest ranking of any days of the liturgical year (see *Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and the Calendar*). But it is far too often the case that members of the faithful do not realize the profound importance of these days.

CREATING A FRAMEWORK

A constant challenge for pastoral staffs is how to better connect with the people in our communities to invite them into fully living the reality of these three days. In particular, for the purposes

of this reflection, how might we better connect the youth and young adults in our communities to the heart of the Paschal Triduum, so they can enter into the fullness of the Paschal Mystery and be fully transformed by Christ's salvific power? How can we better serve the youth and young adults of our communities by helping them get plugged into the experience of Jesus' dying and rising that we actively remember during the most holy days of the liturgical year? How might we better adopt the attitude offered by Pope Francis, as he opened the 2018 Synod on Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment: "[to] broaden our horizons, expand our hearts and transform those frames of mind that today paralyze, separate and alienate us from young people, leaving them exposed to stormy seas, orphans without a faith community that should sustain them, orphans devoid of a sense of direction and meaning in life" (Pope Francis, Homily, October 3, 2018, <http://www.catholicnews.com/services/englishnews/2018/be-lifeline-of-hope-for-youth-alienated-from-church-pope-tells-synod.cfm>)?

By using these central questions as a guide, I hope to create a framework for effective engagement of young people within the three days that lie at the heart of what it means to be a Catholic Christian.

In my work of ministry with youth and young adults for more than a decade, one apparent reality within the lives of young people is a seemingly increased disconnectedness in how they relate with one another, at least in a traditional, interpersonal way. As the use and availability of technology has increased, the ability to connect with others at a distance via social media has certainly surged. But what often seems to suffer as a result of this increased use of technology is the connection with the neighbor sitting next to you, particularly among young people (although my fellow Gen-Xers and I are certainly not immune to this reality). An example speaks to this phenomenon: on any day, I can walk outside my campus ministry office into a student lounge and encounter a dozen undergraduates sitting around a table. All have some sort of screen in front of them, and most are "plugged in," whether via cable or Bluetooth, to devices in their ears. There seems to be a shift in how people are relating with each other, and for teenagers and young adults, communication is much more heavily reliant on the use of technology.

CONNECTING TO THE TRIDUUM AND TO OTHERS

At the heart of Jesus' message, however, is a distinct emphasis on human connectedness. And it is this human connectedness that flows right through the entirety of the Paschal Triduum. From the humble service of the Mandatum of Holy Thursday, moving in procession to the altar of repose that same night, to the gathering at and veneration of the cross on Good Friday, to the apex welcoming of new members of the Body of Christ through baptismal waters, anointing with sacred chrism, and sharing in the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ at the Easter Vigil, the Triduum is markedly communal in every aspect of its liturgies. A proac-



If invited, young people might lend their voices and other musical talents for the days of the Triduum.

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tive invitation to, involvement of, and participation by young people in the Triduum liturgies can help foster true connectedness in the midst of a society that is seemingly shifting to a particular form of disconnectedness.

So the challenge and call presented to us is this: how can youth and young adults become more connected to what the Church is doing, professing, and living out within the liturgies of the Paschal Triduum? And coming out of this, how might a greater connection with the Paschal Triduum serve as a vehicle for a more authentic connection for young people with others?

Assessing the Inclusion of Young People

First, an examination of how youth and young adults are engaged (or not engaged) within the Triduum should be made. How are young people invited to participate in the Triduum in your community? Are they even specifically invited (save from publishing the liturgy schedule in the bulletin, which most likely will not even be looked at by most young people)? Is liturgical catechesis part of the catechetical offerings for youth and young adults? If not, how might a catechetical exploration of the Paschal Triduum be integrated into the formation opportunities for youth and young adults? An inventory of what is currently being done (or not done) is a good first step on the path to a better integration of young people into these most sacred of days.

Secondly, to be truly effective and sustaining, a long-range view needs to be taken with regard to integrating young people into the liturgies of the Triduum. If everything throughout the liturgical year flows into and out of what is central in the Paschal Triduum, namely the Paschal Mystery, then we can (and should) work harder at keeping this profound mystery and reality at the forefront of all that we do throughout the year. Liturgical catechesis is an excellent vehicle for achieving this goal, as identified by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in its enduring document on youth ministry, *Renewing the Vision* (1997):



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Young people could be asked to help with specific tasks for the celebration of the liturgies of the Triduum.

The ministry of prayer and worship . . . provides adolescents with effective and intentional catechesis for liturgy, worship, and sacraments. (Young people are catechized by their participation in the liturgy; therefore, care must be taken to ensure that their experiences lead them to greater faith. Adolescents need catechesis for liturgy and the sacraments, but are also catechized by their experiences of liturgy. Through immersion in the symbols, stories, and rituals of the communal prayer life, adolescents gain not only a knowledge but an appreciation of the power of the sacraments. A specific objective of intentional catechesis for liturgy is to assist adolescents in exploring how liturgical symbols and rituals celebrate their experiences of God and life events.)

Catechizing on the Liturgy

For example, early in the school year, a parish youth group could spend some time exploring the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, which falls on September 14, and how that feast day

ties in with how the Church celebrates the Good Friday liturgy. Throughout the entire liturgical year, attention can be drawn to the particular liturgical colors used at Mass to explore why different colors are used. When Holy Week rolls around (as well as other major feasts throughout the year), young people can be invited to wear the liturgical color of the day in conscious celebration for the particular liturgy in which they are participating. Around the time of Thanksgiving, a youth group meeting could be centered on exploring the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, and how that solemnity is directly tied in with Jesus' triumph over death through the Resurrection. At Christmas, a connection can be drawn between the Incarnation and the Paschal Mystery by reflecting on some of the liturgical texts used during the season. For example, time could be spent catechetically unpacking Preface II of the Nativity of the Lord with a group of young people to draw connections between the Incarnation, specifically celebrated at Christmas, and the Paschal Mystery, specifically celebrated during the liturgies of the Triduum:

It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation,
always and everywhere to give you thanks,
Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God,
through Christ our Lord.

For on the feast of this awe-filled mystery,
though invisible in his own divine nature,
he has appeared visibly in ours;
and begotten before all ages,
he has begun to exist in time;
so that, raising up in himself all that was cast down,
he might restore unity to all creation
and call straying humanity back to the heavenly Kingdom.

And so, with all the Angels, we praise you,
as in joyful celebration we acclaim:

Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts . . .

There is a clear connection in this liturgical text between the Incarnation and the Paschal Mystery, just as there is a clear connection throughout the entirety of Jesus' life on earth. Time can be spent throughout the year exploring the Gospel texts that foreshadow Jesus' passion, death, and ultimately, his Resurrection. Keeping the Paschal Triduum at the forefront of planning for catechetical and youth activities throughout the year can help young people become more familiar with the importance of the Triduum in the life of the Church. The Paschal Mystery is part of our everyday lives as Catholic Christians; sometimes we need to shine some light on this reality to fully participate in it during our day-to-day lives. If parish and campus ministry staffs were to make a concerted effort to include liturgical catechesis on the various aspects of the Paschal Mystery as part of their outreach to young people throughout the year, the effect that this can have on young people promises to be quite profound.

ISSUING AN INVITATION

In addition to seeking avenues for reflection upon the Paschal Triduum throughout the year as a way of introducing young people to these sacred days, authentic invitation to involvement in the Paschal Triduum can be quite effective in fostering appreciation of and participation in the Triduum. I recently conducted an informal survey of some of the undergraduate students with whom I minister at Regis University in Denver, Colorado. The survey sought to assess the participation of these college students within each of the Holy Week liturgies at three stages in their lives: as young children, as high school students, and now as college students. For those who attested to a high percentage of participation in the Holy Week liturgies during their high school years, almost every one of them identified specific individuals who offered a personal invitation to get involved in the liturgy during Holy Week. Whether it was from an altar server coordinator, a youth minister, a teacher, or a member of the parish liturgy committee, the vast majority of respondents who regularly participated in Holy Week liturgies had received some type of direct, personal invitation to become involved in the liturgies.

What structures are in place within your community that can help foster the invitation of young people to become actively involved in the liturgies of the Triduum? Who are the individuals who can be tapped to be a welcoming bridge into the heart of liturgical participation by young people? The opportunity for invitation exists any time that youth and young adults are engaged within the community; sometimes all it takes is some initiative on the part of leadership within the community to invite young people into this engagement.

The question, then, that an invitation to liturgical involvement begs is as such: What is it that we are inviting these young people to? Are we inviting them to simply attend the liturgies of Holy Week? Or are we inviting them to something even greater than that? How do the liturgies of these most important of days connect with young people? How might we actually invite young people to actively participate in and to be empowered to take ownership during the implementation of the most important and sacred liturgies of the year?

Assessing the Openness of the Liturgy Committee

To begin, conduct an honest assessment of the role of the liturgy committee in your community. Is there openness to having new members join this committee? If so, how might young people from the community find a seat at the table during a liturgy preparation meeting? How might a couple of representatives from the parish youth ministry or young adult group become integrated into the liturgy preparation on an ongoing basis? One of my most formative experiences came from an invitation to join the parish liturgy committee while I was in college. Not only was I afforded the opportunity to learn about liturgy, I also was given the chance to share my perspective as a younger member of the parish community. The other members of the committee created a welcoming space for me, and it was evident that my perspective and voice were not only heard but were considered and appreciated. My involvement in the community's liturgy



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Liturgical catechesis on aspects of the Paschal Mystery throughout the year can have a profound impact on young people.

committee all those years ago helped to inflame my passion for liturgy and encouraged me to heed God's call in my life. It ultimately played a large part in shaping my vocation as a lay ecclesial minister within the Church.

Another realm of engagement for young people within the Triduum liturgies is in the actual doing of these sacred liturgies. Are there young people who have musical ability in your community? Have they ever been approached to participate in the music ministry? Perhaps youth and young adults could be invited to help out with the considerable liturgical environment changes that take place during Holy Week. What about the ministry of hospitality? Might youth be invited to be a welcoming presence as the community gathers to take part in its sacred work throughout the liturgies that comprise the Triduum? Part of this hospitality could be utilized as support during the washing of the feet on Holy Thursday night.



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By providing young people an active part in the preparation for the Triduum, liturgy committees will help connect them to the Church.

On Good Friday, if the community's practice is to venerate a large cross, perhaps some young people can be invited to help in bearing the cross. For the Easter Vigil, signs and symbols abound, and much assistance is needed to integrate all aspects of this liturgy. Perhaps some young people can be empowered to assist with the building and caretaking of the Easter fire. The telling of the story of salvation history in the Liturgy of the Word at the Vigil is such a powerful account of God's salvific plan that special attention should be given to how these rich texts are proclaimed. Ideally, all of the passages from the Lectionary should be proclaimed. "In this Vigil, the mother of all Vigils, nine readings are provided, namely seven from the Old Testament and two from the New . . . all of which should be read whenever this can be done, so that the character of the Vigil, which demands an extended period of time, may be preserved" (*The Roman Missal*, "The Easter Vigil," 20). It also provides a profound occasion for young people to share God's Word with the community.

Richness of Liturgies Forms Faith

The rich liturgies of the Paschal Triduum provide myriad roles in which young people can lend their talents and gifts, providing the foundation for youth and young adults to be formed in their faith, if only they were invited and empowered to participate. Ask yourself: what are the forces/structures/ruts/fears that are keeping my community from fully inviting young people into active participation in the Paschal Triduum liturgies? How might these limiting realities be overcome so that these young members of the Body of Christ may be empowered to take part

in their call to prepare the liturgies of these high holy days? Flowing out of the Paschal Triduum, youth and young adults can also be included in an evaluation of how these liturgies were experienced by people in the community. It is important to include their voices in any evaluation a community may undertake.

EMPOWERMENT THAT LEADS TO CONNECTION

As we near the third decade of this century, young people in the United States are experiencing an explosion of new ways to communicate, which is paradoxically leading to increased disconnection and distraction in their day-to-day lives. Early in Jesus' public ministry, he offers an invitation to those who are curious about who he is and what he is doing: "When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, 'What are you looking for?' They said to him, 'Rabbi . . . , where are you staying?' He said to them, 'Come and see.' They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day" (John 1:38–39). In his earthly ministry, Jesus is the master connector who brings people together with the sharing of the Good News of God's Kingdom. In the holy days of the Paschal Triduum, we are invited into true connection with Christ and with one another through the heart of the Paschal Mystery. Extending true invitation to and empowerment of young people within the Paschal Triduum connects young people to Christ and his Church. This can transform their lives for good. Let us strive to actively invite young people to "come and see" in order to encounter the Christ through the symbol and sacrament of the Paschal Triduum. Doing so might just open the doors for them to fully experience the power of true connection within an increasingly disconnected world. ♦

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