

Holy Week



**at Holy Trinity
Church Geneva
2016**

Holy Week and Easter day represent the most significant moments of liturgical time in the whole of the Church's Year. The liturgies that we celebrate at this time bring us very close to the saving work of God in Christ in a way that nothing else can possibly do.

So it is good to take the opportunities that this week brings in the fullest possible way. Whilst no one can probably manage to be at everything, there are some parts of the week which are particularly powerful.

*For a start, it is useful to remember that the purpose of all liturgical worship is to enable us, by the working of the Holy Spirit, to come close to the presence of the Risen Lord amongst us. Everything that we do and say in the Liturgy should not draw attention to those performing the **work of God** (that's what the Greek word from which liturgy comes actually means) but rather be transparent to what is symbolised within it.*

In Holy Week, we re-enact the events of our Lord's last week in flesh on earth. The drama unfolds, and we see it before our eyes in the liturgical celebrations. We can watch this, as it were, from afar as we watch a play in the theatre, separated from the reality by the proscenium arch, weighing up its validity and interest value. Or alternatively, we find ourselves not just among the curious spectators but drawn into the action. In the events of Holy Week, and the adventures and insights of people and prophets that coloured their interpretation, there is something personal and intimate. Faith speaks to faith. Secrets are shared. We are invited into the inner circle, ushered behind closed doors. We even find ourselves tuned into Jesus' own wavelength. This

is to experience Holy Week and Easter from the inside, when we are auditioned for the part we are to take as the great drama of salvation continues to be played out in the times in which we live and all the times to come until the harvest of the Kingdom of God. What we do this week impacts upon the people we are throughout the year ahead, and how we make use of the life God shares with us for his purposes.



The week begins with a liturgical re-enactment of Jesus' entry into the Holy City of Jerusalem at the beginning of the week. This enduring picture of Jesus riding into the city, not on a war-horse but

upon a beast of burden, signals the start of the final countdown. What did Jesus intend, what were the disciples thinking, what went through the heads of the bystanders, what shaped the telling of the incident? The 'choreography' seems to have been from the prophecy in Zechariah (9:9) which sees a Messiah whose power is tempered by humility. Spreading garments was a spontaneous gesture of respect (see the welcome to the king in 2 Kings 9:13). 'Hosanna' ('save now'), with its ritual shaking of foliage, was remembered from the psalm sung at the feast of the tabernacles (Psalm 118 – part of which we sing in the Palm Sunday Liturgy). 'Blessed is he' is in a later verse of that psalm, a welcome to pilgrims going up to the celebrations. It was not until the story had run its course, through Holy Week, Easter and Pentecost, that the many strands of this incident would come together to reveal the true nature of the servant king and what he asked of his followers. Our Christian growth is similarly punctuated by events not fully understood at the time but which strengthen, pattern and illuminate our path of discipleship.

It is so easy for us to be overwhelmed by enthusiasm – and how dangerous this can be! The crowds were certainly enthusiastic as Jesus arrived. Their enthusiasm changed direction, however, as the week progressed to a different sort altogether. They saw only what they wished to see and their vision of a messiah was not one of a vulnerable, servant King. For him, there was to be only one possible fate – execution.



Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of Holy Week, Jesus spent quietly with his friends. These days are reflected in the Gospel readings at the Eucharist for each day – on Monday, we discover Jesus at Bethany with Martha, Mary and Lazarus. It is the occasion of a spectacularly generous and wasteful outpouring of love. Something that Judas Iscariot (who seems to have been with them) cannot abide.

Tuesday and Wednesday, that lurking figure of Judas comes out from the shades a little more in the Gospel readings. As he leaves the supper room after sharing bread with Jesus and his friends, we are told how night had fallen. There is a chill in the air. S. John doesn't hesitate to speak of evil having entered Judas, but perhaps as yet it has only a toehold. There seems to be some kind of understanding between the Lord and Judas – even if Jesus is aware that Judas' complete misreading of Jesus will lead ultimately to betrayal. Yet it is 'on the night when he was betrayed', the night when

he was handed over that Jesus showed the extent of his limitless love. Judas is always with us in our human relationships, both as the one who betrays with a kiss and the one whom we accuse as scapegoat.

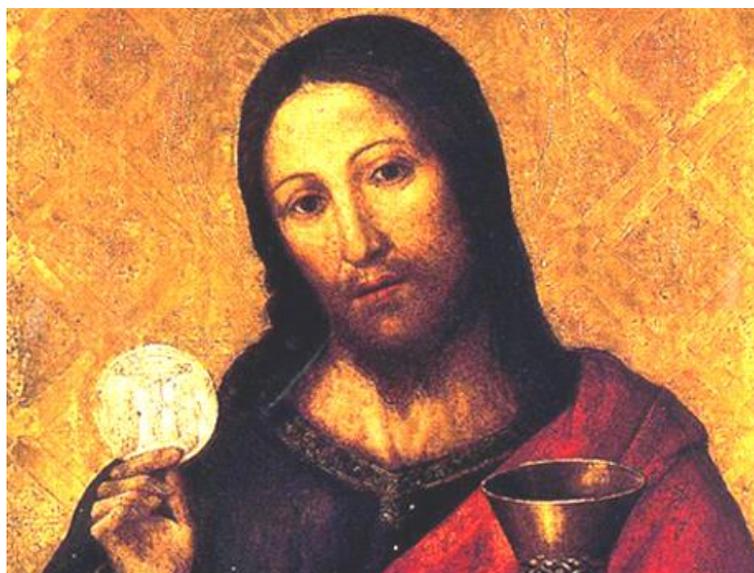


With Maundy Thursday, things move forward again. In the morning, by tradition, clergy meet for the Eucharist with their Bishop at which they renew their Ordination vows and the Oils of the Catechumens, of the Sick, and of Chrism are consecrated. In our diocese, it is more usual for this to take place earlier in Holy Week because of travel – but the Old Catholic Church (with which Anglicans are fully in communion) celebrate the

Chrism Mass on this day – this year in Bern.

And then, later in the day, we are in the Upper Room with the Lord and the twelve, soon to be eleven. It is a celebration full of poignancy – a moment truly transparent to many things, including how the Lord sees his life and mission. This is what being Messiah is from the inside – washing the feet, feeding the spiritual hunger, offering himself as the new Paschal sacrifice, the true Lamb slain, in God's eternity, and all for the transformation of all life.

So we celebrate the Eucharist together remembering the Lord's institution of it, the re-working of the Passover. We wash feet and we rejoice in a moment of light and joy around the Table. But at the end of the Eucharist, the



mood changes. We process out with the Sacrament to the altar representing Gethsemane, and we watch for a little time with Jesus. Meanwhile, a darkness descends over the church building symbolic of the gathering clouds, the bloody tears and sweat that later will be shed. The main altar is stripped, the light focussed now just on that place where the Sacrament, reserved for Holy

Communion the following day in the Liturgy, remains and we watch – for as long or short a time as you wish and are able.

Good Friday is not like any other day. From 12 noon until 3 in the afternoon we watch, ponder and listen, with the help of words from the Scriptures, of hymns and music, of addresses. It is a delight that this moment is shared with brothers and sisters from other parts of the whole Church as we all kneel together at the foot of the Cross – beholding its mystery, its truth, its saving power. There is a moment in Bach’s St. Matthew Passion where the cry, ‘Let him be crucified’, is set to a jagged, chromatic theme, with the voices arranged so that the words tumble over each other in their vehemence. It is an ugly sound, full of self-regard and bluster, and yet all the skill of a great composer has gone into achieving the effect. We too easily assume that injustices are the result just of thoughtlessness. Yet it can be people of gifts and skill who are the instruments of anguish and dispossession. The bomber can also be a caring family man, the torturer – a favourite with his grandchildren, the demagogue – a person of learning. Aggression all too easily follows a desire of greater prosperity for all. Even under the guise of religious rectitude we can dismiss and devalue those for whom Christ also died. It is all too easy for us to set limits to our love, or filter out the information which does not accord with our chosen standpoint. Good Friday challenges such misconceptions for here we see the Judgement of the world – both the world’s judgement of Christ and through Christ’s self-offering love, God’s judgement of the world.

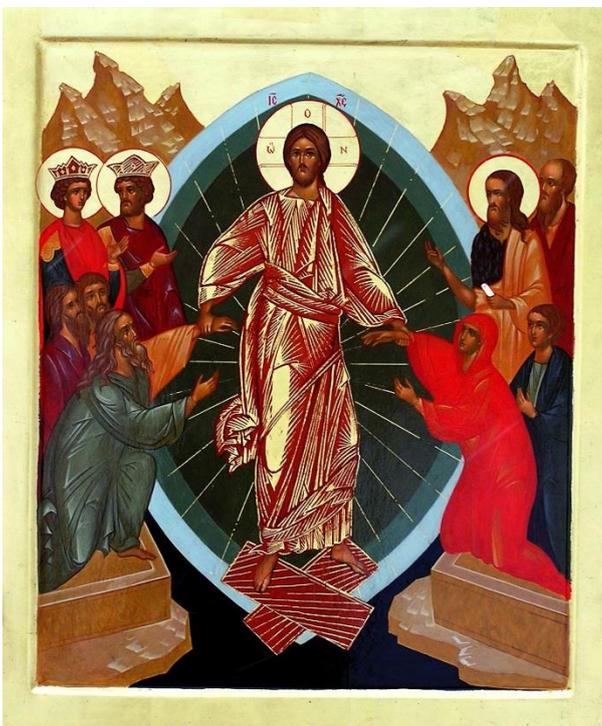


The Liturgy for Good Friday, like the day itself, is not like the liturgy of any other occasion. Its full title is the Liturgy of the Celebration of the Passion and Death of the Lord. A curious title, but a liturgy, nonetheless, that takes us right to the heart of the matter of salvation. It begins in powerful silence as the celebrant prostrates before the stripped altar. We pray together and then listen to the mysterious prophecy of Isaiah who speaks of just such a suffering servant whose mark will indelibly be left on humanity. We listen to the words of S. John’s account of the Passion of the Lord – and again, there can be no curious bystanders here. We are all involved in the Passion – everyone has a part to play, for everyone is involved. Afterwards, we pray for the church and the world in the oldest form of the Prayer of the Faithful that we know – the Good Friday ‘Solemn’ Prayers. Then the drama continues as we bring into the body of the church a simple wooden Cross.

As we do this, symbolically we express our love for the instrument by which God saves the world. This may indeed be a conundrum to our minds – a perplexing, irritating paradox. Perhaps the only way to express our worship of this is to kneel in its presence and adore. Some may not feel able to express their worship with the kiss of veneration – and that doesn't matter – but however we find the best expression on this stark day to show our love and worship of the Lord's instrument of salvation, the music and hymns we sing at this time will help us too. Unveiled for us to see in all its starkness, we adore and bless the Lord Christ who by this Holy Cross has redeemed the world.

By ancient tradition, the Eucharist is never celebrated on Good Friday. But the special Liturgy allows the opportunity – for those who wish – to receive Holy Communion from the Sacrament reserved on Maundy Thursday evening. This action ties together what happened in the Upper Room and what happened on the Cross of Calvary. Tonight only we receive the Sacrament solely under the species of Bread.

The Good Friday liturgy ends as it began – in silence as we contemplate the bare Cross, the mystery of the Crucified God.



Holy Saturday follows – a day for us of quiet expectation. Though for the ones close to Jesus in the aftermath of treason, betrayal, denial and flight it must have dawned like a deep ache in the heart of God himself. An emptiness beyond belief. The Eastern Church makes much on this day of the Harrowing of Hell – and in a series of wonderful icons of the Resurrection, the earliest of which date from the sixth century, we see the Risen Lord bringing Adam and Eve out of their prison into the new life and light of a transformed world. In some later icons there is the suggestion that here in this moment, the Risen Christ re-introduces Adam and Eve – the Resurrection is about reconciliation. Reconciliation of humanity with God and with one another.

The Holy Saturday Vigil followed by the first Eucharist of Easter is like a great liturgical party! First, we have a bonfire outside the church building – ancient symbols are at work here that we know from pre-Christian times. The lighting of fires at the equinox

to ensure the sun's return. New life and light from death and decay. Then, from the leaping flames is lit the Paschal Candle. A symbol of the Risen Christ – whose wounds, five and glorious, are still visible though now transformed. This light is carried with chant into the church building, where first we assemble in its shared light (from the candles we all carry, lit from the Paschal flame) to hear a song of praise to God for his wonderful providence and love – the Exultet. After that, we settle down to listen in the light of the risen Christ to the ancient scriptures and prophecies in which the hope of a new and reconciled world was expressed. The Gloria of the first Mass of Easter is then intoned – bells are rung furiously! – and we celebrate the Victory of God through his Crucified and Risen Son. All is not yet complete. Christ's dying and rising is realised in us through baptism and eucharist. After the Gospel reading and brief homily, we bless water and renew our baptism pledges, being sprinkled with the water as a reminder of our new birth in Christ.



Easter morning sees us together as God's family in celebration of the Resurrection. It is but the beginning of fifty days of joy – longer than Lent – which will conclude with the commemoration of the Ascension and then the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The means by which the new life of Easter is unleashed perpetually into our world through those who are open to his love and power. And yes, chocolate (and lots more) is back on the menu!

The three days (the Triduum as it is known) of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday-Easter Day hold together as a single entity. As each year of celebration passes, so we may enter more deeply into the mystery that they celebrate and embody. We cannot understand fully what is happening here – but in opening our hearts as well as our minds to this yearly moment of grace, in body, emotion, intellect and intuition we shall find our lives transformed.

I wish you every blessing in celebrating together this sacred time – and much Easter joy in the season ahead.

Alex Gordon – March 2016

SERVICES during HOLY WEEK 2016

PALM SUNDAY of the PASSION of the LORD – March 20th

| | |
|-------|---|
| 9.00 | Eucharist |
| 10.30 | Blessing of Palms, Procession and Eucharist |
| 17.00 | Organ Recital by Gordon Stewart |
| 18.00 | Reception, <i>followed by</i> |
| 19.00 | Choral Evensong for Palm Sunday |

MONDAY in HOLY WEEK

| | |
|-------|------------------------|
| 07.30 | Eucharist |
| 19.30 | Eucharist with address |

TUESDAY in HOLY WEEK

| | |
|-------|------------------------|
| 19.30 | Eucharist with address |
|-------|------------------------|

WEDNESDAY in HOLY WEEK

| | |
|-------|------------------------|
| 19.30 | Eucharist with address |
|-------|------------------------|

MAUNDY THURSDAY

| | |
|-------|---|
| NB | No morning Eucharist – Chrism Mass in Bern |
| 19.30 | Eucharist of the Lord's Supper, with foot washing, stripping of the altar and (optional) vigil before the Blessed Sacrament until 22.00 |

GOOD FRIDAY

| | |
|------------|---|
| 12 – 15.00 | Ecumenical service with addresses, music and hymns around readings from the Passion |
| 19.30 | The Celebration of the Passion and Death of the Lord |

HOLY SATURDAY

| | |
|-------|--|
| 20.00 | The Paschal Vigil and First Mass of Easter |
|-------|--|

EASTER DAY – March 27th

| | |
|-------|---|
| 2.00 | <i>NB – Clocks GO FORWARD ONE HOUR!!</i> |
| 9.00 | Eucharist |
| 10.30 | Sung Eucharist of Easter Day <i>followed by Egg Hunt!</i> |
| 19.00 | Informal Worship with Eucharist |

Those wishing to make their confession before Easter, please arrange with the Chaplain for a mutually convenient time.