

8

CELEBRATING THE CROSS AND RESURRECTION

The central event of the Christian faith is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That unitive event of cross and resurrection is the core of the apostolic preaching; it is also the central celebration of the church's liturgy. It is set forth in the Eucharist and in the daily prayer of morning and evening. It is the focus of the church year: Lent prepares for it, and the great Fifty Days are a celebration of it. More specifically, Lent is the preparation for the celebration of the mystery of redemption; Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, the Easter Vigil, and the Fifty Days are the proclamation and celebration of it. It is one event, seen from two sides: cross and resurrection, each incomplete without the other.

ASH WEDNESDAY: HISTORY

Lent derives from the preparation of candidates for Baptism. By the middle of the fourth century at Jerusalem, candidates for Baptism fasted 40 days, and during this period the catechetical lectures of Cyril of Jerusalem were delivered to them. The length of the fast was suggested by several biblical prototypes: Jesus' fast at the beginning of his ministry;¹ Moses' stay on Sinai;² the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness; Elijah's fast on his way to the mountain of God.³

After the legalization of Christianity in 313, the period of preparation for Baptism became a general period of preparation of all Christians for Easter. The length of the fast was 36 days—six weeks, not counting Sundays, which are always feasts celebrating the resurrection—and was thought to be a tithe or tenth of the 365 days of the year.

In sixth-century Rome four days were added to the beginning of Lent to bring it to the biblical number of 40 days, and by the end of the seventh or the beginning of the eighth century, the 40-day Lent had become general in the West. (The Eastern church has an eight-week Lent, excluding Thursdays and Saturdays as well as Sundays.)

Ash Wednesday was originally a day for the expulsion of penitents from the church, the beginning of a time of temporary excommunication. In the fourth century those undergoing church discipline had to endure several stages of excommunication and reinstatement: *weepers*, who stood outside the church door asking the prayers of those who went in; *hearers*, who were allowed in the narthex; *kneelers*, who were required to kneel with the standing congregation; *standers* who stood with the congregation but who had to leave before the Communion. Several years might be spent in each of the stages.⁴ In succeeding centuries, however, this public penitence was joined to Lent; and at the beginning of Lent (Sunday) or on the Wednesday before Lent (40 days before Easter), the penitents were placed under discipline. (The time was called *quarantine*, for “forty.”) They were admonished, prayed for, given the laying-on of hands, and expelled from the church before the Eucharist.

As early as the third century Tertullian mentions ashes as an external sign of public penitence. In the ninth century the imposition of ashes⁵ together with the seven penitential psalms were added to the rite of expulsion of penitents from church during Lent, and the day came to be known as Ash Wednesday. By the eleventh century, the discipline of public penitence had largely disappeared and Lent was accepted by the entire church as a time to receive ashes and undergo penitence.

ASH WEDNESDAY: A DAY OF ATONEMENT

The spirit of Ash Wednesday is most solemn, close to that of the Jewish Day of Atonement. The suggested color is black, the color of ashes and desolation. The Ash Wednesday liturgy marks the beginning of a penitential discipline which climaxes in the absolution and peace of the Maundy Thursday liturgy. The mood is penitence and reflection on the quality of our faith and life; its goal is participation in the

Lenten discipline, which, by its focus on the mystery of redemption, should strengthen us by bringing us anew to the gift of our Baptism. The service, while most somber, should not be maudlin. Penitential acts should be related to restoration and to spiritual and moral growth, as the derivation of the word "Lent" suggests. "Lent" is from an Anglo-Saxon word meaning "springtime" and so is to be understood as the holy springtime of the soul, a time for preparation, planting, and growth.

Ashes are prepared for this service by burning palm (or olive) branches from the previous Palm Sunday and grinding the ashes into powder by working them through a wire mesh sieve with a spoon and perhaps mixing the ashes with a little water or oil. The mixture is placed in a small shallow vessel (a glass dish is suitable) from which the ashes are imposed. A damp towel or napkin for cleansing the ministers' hands after the imposition should be provided.

The preparation of the ashes may be done privately or it might be part of the Shrove Tuesday activity in the congregation. At the conclusion of this "eve of the Fast" celebration, the palms could be burned in a fireplace or in the church in a clean outdoor barbeque grill. The palms should be cut into short pieces to facilitate burning. The preparation of the palms might conclude with the pleasant medieval custom of the farewell to Alleluia. A banner might be made with the word "Alleluia" prominent on it. An antiphon from the Ambrosian Rite for the First Sunday in Lent, which reflects the putting away of Alleluia, might be sung or said:

Alleluia. Enclose and seal up the word, alleluia. Let it remain in the secret of your heart, alleluia, until the appointed time. You shall say it with great joy when that day comes. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.⁶

The banner is carried out of the church and hidden away, and the hymn "Alleluia, song of sweetness" (*Service Book and Hymnal* 58) is sung, which looks to Lent and beyond it to Easter and beyond this life to the gladness of heaven.

Ashes are an extraordinarily rich symbol rooted in ancient customs and practices.⁷ Ashes, in a Jewish and Christian context suggest judgment and God's condemnation of sin;⁸ frailty, our total dependence upon God for life;⁹ humiliation;¹⁰ and repentance.¹¹ We are reminded forcefully of the words of the committal in the burial service, ". . . earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust." For one day those words will be said over us.

Moreover, ashes suggest cleansing and renewal.¹² They were once used as a cleansing agent in the absence of soap, and on Ash Wednesday the ashes

have sometimes been understood as a penitential substitute for water as a sign of Baptism.¹³ (And Baptism is a primary emphasis of Lent.) Water both stifles and refreshes, drowns and makes alive; so the ashes also tell of both death and renewal. A further example of death and renewal shown by ashes is the ancient custom of burning the fields in the spring to destroy the old and to prepare for the new.

ASH WEDNESDAY: THE LITURGY

Throughout Lent, all pictures, crosses, and statues that cannot be removed from the church may be covered with veils of unbleached linen (or purple) to suggest that Lent is a time of austerity, purification, and spiritual cleansing. Flowers should not be used to decorate the altar or chancel during Lent. On Ash Wednesday the organ should be used only to accompany congregational singing; there should be no prelude or postlude on this solemn day.

The act of confession and repentance is made at the beginning of the Ash Wednesday liturgy, replacing the entrance rite. This recalls that the ancient church would send the penitents away before the Holy Communion began. There is no opening or entrance hymn. The service begins with the ministers, vested in albs or surplices and stoles (the presiding minister may wear a black or purple cope), entering silently and going to their places. When the ministers enter the church, the congregation stands. When the ministers have arrived at their places, Psalm 51 is sung¹⁴ or said, with the *Gloria Patri*.

The presiding minister addresses the exhortation to the congregation. Other words than those provided may be used but care must be taken that the content be similar to the form provided.¹⁵ The congregation kneels and silence is kept for meditation and self-examination. When there are no facilities for kneeling, the congregation should sit during the confession, since standing is not conducive to meditation. Some may nonetheless wish to kneel on the floor of the church rather than sit for the meditation and confession. The confession¹⁶ includes both things done and things left undone, what we have committed and what we have omitted.

The imposition of ashes should be available for those who desire to receive this sign of frailty, repentance, and renewal. Those who desire to receive ashes kneel before the altar (as is often done at communion). The ministers (assisting ministers may join the presiding minister in giving the ashes) apply the ashes first to each other and then to the forehead of each penitent, with the words of God to Adam, "Remember that you are dust

and to dust you shall return.”¹⁷ Personal names, which are sometimes used in the distribution of Holy Communion (“The body of Christ, John, given for you”) are not appropriate in the imposition of ashes which shows our common mortality.¹⁸ The ashes are applied with the thumb in the form of a small cross. The words “Remember that you are dust . . .” are addressed to each person. During the imposition of ashes silence should be maintained. It is not a time for soft organ music or choir pieces. The congregation could be directed to meditate on Psalm 90 during the distribution of the ashes.¹⁹

The ashes having been imposed on those who desire them, the presiding minister leads the congregation in the conclusion of the confession, all kneeling. The presiding minister then stands and addresses to the congregation and to God a plea for true repentance. There is no absolution at this point, for that is done on Maundy Thursday. The time between Ash Wednesday and Maundy Thursday is thus marked out as the time of penitence.

The congregation sits for a time of meditation. The ministers retire to the sacristy to wash their hands and to allow the presiding minister to put on the chasuble, if one is worn. The people stand when the ministers enter and go to their places for the Holy Communion. If the ministers remain in the chancel and sit for meditation, the congregation and the ministers stand for the Greeting and the Prayer of the Day. The Prayer of the Day for Ash Wednesday may also be used on weekdays during Lent (it may be more suitable than continuing the Sunday prayer throughout the week). Using the prayer daily helps tie the themes of Lent together by providing a central focus on repentance and renewal.

The form of the Holy Communion on Ash Wednesday should be simple and restrained. Following the First Lesson (Joel 2:12-19), Psalm 103:8-14 is sung. Following the Second Lesson (2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:2), the Verse (the Tract), Joel 2:13, which echoes the First Lesson, is sung. Conveniently, it is the Verse printed in the text of the service. The Hymn of the Day, “Out of the depths” (295), is enhanced if it is sung unaccompanied. The Creed is not said on this solemn day. Eucharistic Prayer IV might be used without Preface or Sanctus in keeping with the somber spirit of the day. “Lamb of God” is appropriate during the distribution of Communion. The *Nunc Dimittis* or a hymn is appropriate after communion. The third post-communion prayer (“Almighty God, you gave your Son . . .”) is appropriate for Lent.

Throughout the rest of Lent, a special processional cross made of wood, painted red, without the figure of Christ on it may be used instead of the usual one.

THE GREAT AND HOLY WEEK

St. Augustine called Holy Week the Great Week because of the great things that were accomplished during these days. By the powerful and dramatic liturgy of the great week, Christians share in the events they celebrate.

The purpose of Holy Week . . . was to set the facts of the Gospel before the worshippers; but it must be emphasized that this should not be taken to mean that Holy Week is merely an occasion for pious remembrance. It is or should be more than a series of commemorations of past events recalled to mind; it is or should be the means whereby the worshippers participate in the saving events. We should not think of it as a number of ceremonies at which the faithful are present, but as a unified sequence of sacramental acts whereby they commit themselves afresh to Christ and share anew in His death and resurrection.

Unless the Church can learn to identify itself with Christ in His death and resurrection, unless it can, on Palm Sunday, approach His victory through death, die with Him on Good Friday and rise with Him at the culmination of the Paschal Vigil, it cannot accomplish its mission, which is not only to proclaim the good news but to embody it and to make it the pattern of its corporate life, even as Christ Himself not only proclaimed the Gospel but was and is the Gospel.²⁰

Traditionally, the daily prayer of the church was said during Holy Week in an unadorned ancient form. In Morning Prayer the Invitatory and Venite (Ministers Edition, pp. 47-48) are not sung, and the opening verses (p. 46) may be omitted also so that the service begins with the Psalms (which was the most ancient practice). Traditionally the hymns too are omitted since they are a comparatively late addition to the Office. After the Psalms (and silence and psalm prayers), the Lessons are read, silence is kept, the Gospel canticle with the proper antiphon is sung, and the prayers are said.

Evening Prayer begins with Psalm 141; the Service of Light is omitted. As in Morning Prayer, the hymn may be omitted also to preserve the ancient form of the Office. Instrumental music is used only if the congregation cannot otherwise maintain the song.

THE SUNDAY OF THE PASSION

The liturgy for the first day of Holy Week is in two parts. It begins with a procession with palms as a dramatic prelude to the Eucharist; this memorable ceremony gives the nickname “Palm-Sunday” to the day. The service itself is a celebration of the Passion of Jesus Christ, a highlight of which is the reading (or singing) of the passion account of Matthew, Mark, or Luke. As a prelude to the reading of the passion, the procession with palms provides for an appropriate outburst of joy which does not lose sight of the solemn goal of Jesus’ triumphal entry. He rides on to die. The somberness of the passion, which is the focus of Holy Week, is thus framed by the joy of the preparatory procession and by the greater joy of Easter which is its purpose and culmination.

THE SUNDAY OF THE PASSION: PROCESSION WITH PALMS

The service begins with a procession of the ministers and the congregation commemorating the Lord’s entry into Jerusalem. (The procession with palms is as old as the fourth century and appears to have originated in Jerusalem). In the procession everyone carries palms or other branches. Ritually and symbolically the church becomes Jerusalem for the time of the service, and Jesus again enters his city. The past becomes present and the future is foreshadowed when Jesus will lead his people into the new Jerusalem, the heavenly city in which the Easter celebration will find its fulfillment.

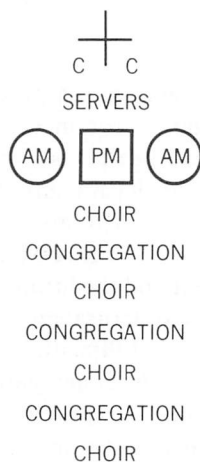
For the most dramatic effect, the congregation should gather in a parish house, the church basement, the porch of the church, or, if it is commodious enough, the narthex. From here the procession moves into the church. (The crowds met Jesus outside Jerusalem and accompanied him into the city.) A sufficient quantity of palm branches is placed ready for distribution as people gather for the service. Other branches, especially olive branches, may be used instead. (English churches commonly use pussywillow, yew, and boxwood.) The distribution of branches is completed before the service begins.

The ministers vest in albs or surplices with scarlet stoles and the presiding minister in a scarlet cope or chasuble. The ministers, with their assistants gathered around, begin the service from a place where they can be heard and from which the procession is easily begun. If it is necessary to begin in the church, the ministers may stand in front of the congregation in the

chancel or at the back of the church, the congregation standing and facing them.

The presiding minister says or sings the opening verse, salutation, and the collect (Ministers Edition, pp. 134-135), which set the focus for the meditation of Holy Week: "those mighty acts whereby you have given us life everlasting." An assisting minister reads the Processional Gospel for the year (A, B, or C), telling the story of the first Palm Sunday.

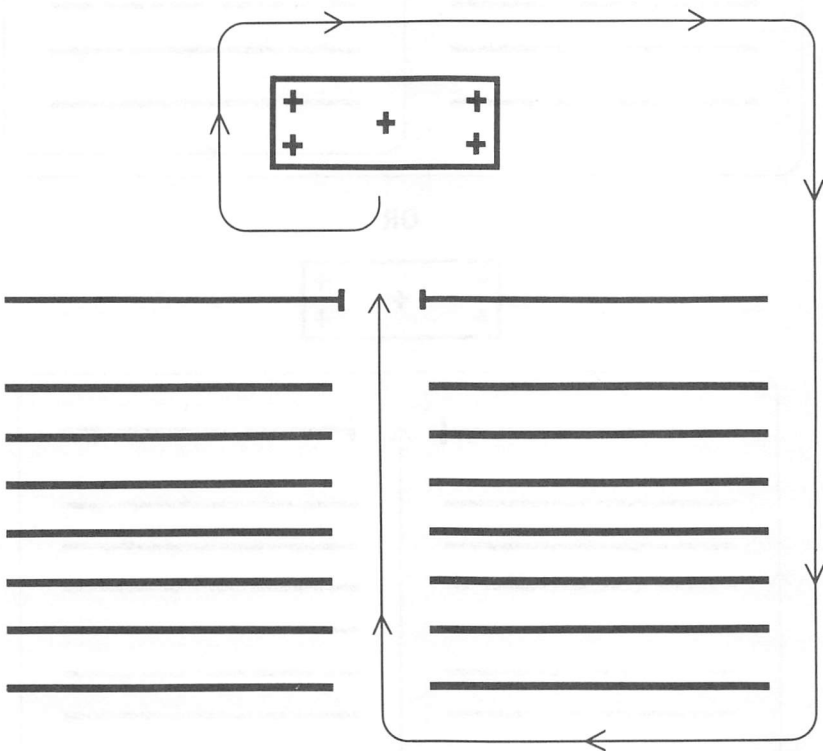
The congregation lifts up their branches and the presiding minister begins the thanksgiving. (The verse "Lift up your hearts" and its response "We lift them to the Lord" is used only in the eucharistic dialog.) An assisting minister sings or says the verse, "Let us go forth in peace," and the procession into the church begins, or, if the congregation is already in the church, the procession through the church or around the church begins.



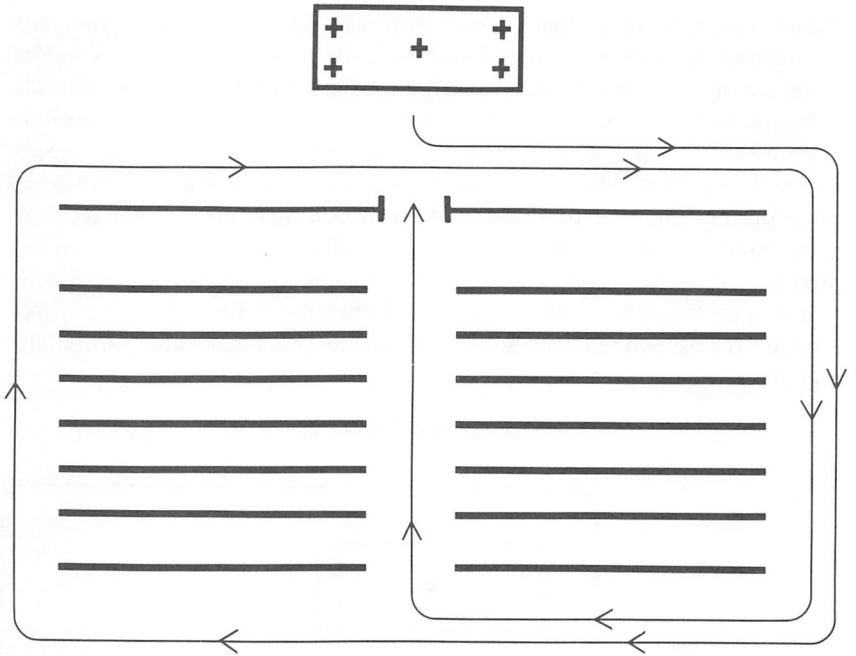
When there is a choir, dispersing its members in units throughout the procession results in more vital singing. Instruments such as trumpets may be used to assist the congregational singing. "All glory, laud, and honor" (Hymn 108) written by Theodolph, Bishop of Orleans while in prison, has been traditional at the procession since the ninth century. The choir may sing the stanzas of the hymn and the congregation the refrain. Other hymns may also be used if the procession is long. "Ride on, ride on in majesty," "Hosanna to the living Lord," "The Son of God goes forth to war," and

“Onward Christian soldiers” are appropriate. The processional route may be around the outside of the church building or around the block before entering the church. Or it may simply be around the interior of the church. (Diagrams below and next page.) Even when the procession is entirely within the church, the congregation should be encouraged to join—especially the children. The ministers pause before the altar steps until all are in their places. The verse that is sung by the presiding minister, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,” and the reply, “Hosanna in the highest,” echo the verse with which the procession began, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,” and the reply, “Hosanna to the Son of David.” These two antiphons thus bracket the procession with palms. The ministers then go to their places.

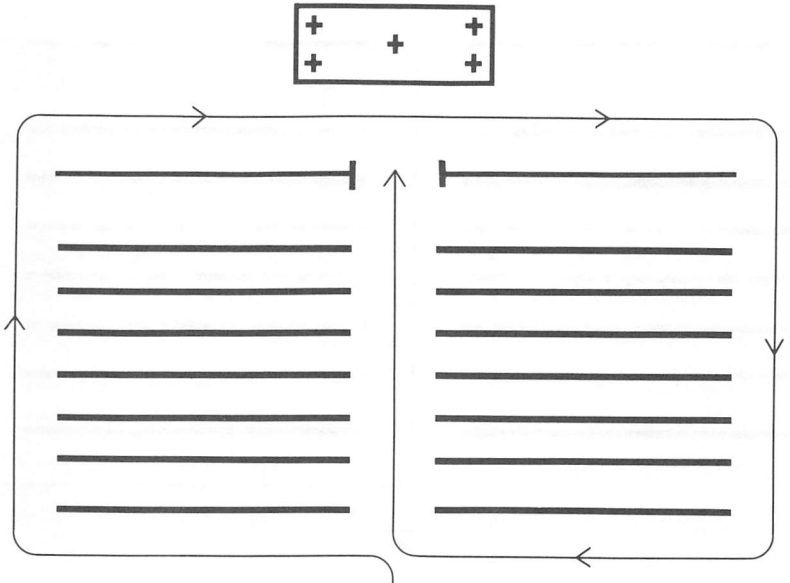
PROCESSION WITH PALMS



OR



OR



THE SUNDAY OF THE PASSION: THE HOLY COMMUNION

The procession with palms is the entrance rite of this Sunday. The Eucharist then begins with the salutation and the Prayer of the Day.

The Holy Communion for the Sunday of the Passion focuses on the Passion as the Gospel for the day. The usual acclamations before and after the gospel (“Glory to you, O Lord;” “Praise to you, O Christ”) are omitted on this day. The reading is announced: “The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ according to St. Matthew/Mark/Luke.” The Passion should be read by several readers who assume the chief roles, or it should be sung according to a setting composed for liturgical use. It must be carefully practiced. Because the reading is long (and pastors and congregations need to be encouraged to use the whole reading and not choose the abbreviated form), the congregation may sit for the reading. It has been traditional, however, for them to stand for the final portion—at Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44. At the words telling of Jesus’ death (Matthew 27:50; Mark 15:37; Luke 23:46), it has been traditional for the reader to pause in silent meditation.²¹

The proclamation of the Passion must always be carefully prepared and rehearsed so that it is done with dignity and solemnity. It is more than a reading; it is a presentation of the drama of salvation.

The reading or singing of the entire Passion makes a long sermon undesirable at this service. A brief devotional commentary or homily may be more appropriate than the more usual sermon. In some cases, the sermon may be omitted altogether at this service.

The music should reflect the character of the service, which changes from the exuberance of the procession to the solemnity of the Passion. The Hymn of the Day, “A Lamb goes uncomplaining forth” (105), should receive special attention.

The Creed, a festive element in the service, is omitted in keeping with the solemnity of the day.

Eucharistic Prayer I is most appropriate for the Sunday of the Passion, but Prayer IV, with its vigorous review of the work of Christ, should be considered for use throughout the week. (With Prayer IV, “Holy, holy, holy Lord” is not sung.)

Hymns sung during the distribution of Communion should reflect the Passion.

After the service, some of the palm branches should be saved to provide ashes for Ash Wednesday of the following year. The people should be encouraged to take their branches home and keep them as a reminder through the year that they have participated in the procession and service with which Holy Week began. Customarily the branches are placed behind crosses or religious pictures.

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Before the fifth century there seem to have been no services on Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday of Holy Week, and there has never been much of an attempt to reconstruct liturgically the day-by-day chronology of Holy Week. The emphasis has always been on the Passion as a whole. The emphasis continues to fall, as it always has, on the Sunday of the Passion and the *Triduum*, the three sacred days of Thursday, Friday, and Saturday—seen as one celebration—in which are commemorated the central events of Christianity. Each day of this triduum needs the other two to complete the account, the doctrine, and the proclamation. The preferred color of Maundy Thursday is the scarlet of Passiontide.

MAUNDY THURSDAY: THE CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

Ash Wednesday began with an extended confession of sins; the absolution was deferred until Maundy Thursday. The service for the Thursday in Holy Week therefore begins in an unusual way—with the sermon, which concludes with an invitation to confession and with the absolution and the sharing of the peace. All this is done before the Holy Communion begins, not simply as a novelty but to close off the time of repentance, to conclude the season of penitence with the long-awaited absolution, recalling the ancient practice of reconciling penitents on this day. Then with that done and the reconciliation of the church effected, the last three days of Lent begin, the most intense meditation upon the mystery of redemption: Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday.

Moreover, the relocation of the sermon enables the preacher to deal with the various aspects of the theme of Jesus' love as a background for the entire service not just of one day but of three days.

If a hymn is sung before the sermon, it should not be elaborately done but should be the occasion only for the simple entrance of the ministers. There is no procession of the choir. It is in keeping with the spirit of the service to have the ministers enter in silence, the congregation standing. The presiding minister may wear a scarlet (or purple) cope for this part of the service.

The Instruction may be part of the sermon or it may conclude the sermon. After that, the congregation makes the confession for which it has been preparing throughout Lent. The appropriate form is the Order for Corporate Confession and Forgiveness (Ministers Edition, p. 318).

An assisting minister says, "Let us kneel and make confession to God." The people kneel (or sit if there are no facilities for kneeling) and confess "Almighty God, merciful Father, I, a troubled and penitent sinner confess to you. . . ." The presiding minister stands and addresses the congregation, "Almighty God in his mercy has given his Son to die for us. . . ." Those in the congregation may come forward and kneel before the altar. The presiding minister lays both hands on each person's head and addresses each in turn. "In obedience to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins." Each penitent responds, "Amen."

In very small congregations the form for Individual Confession and Forgiveness may be used (sections 3-6).

Following the pronouncement of forgiveness, the peace is exchanged. It is not repeated later in the service. When forgiveness has been pronounced individually, the minister may immediately help each person stand and exchange the peace with that person. If the congregation is large, several ordained ministers may be involved in the individual forgiveness and exchange of the peace. Thus penitents are reconciled to God and to each other.

MAUNDY THURSDAY: THE HOLY COMMUNION

The Lenten discipline having been concluded, the church now turns its attention to the most intense celebration of the cross and resurrection of Christ.

The ministers return to their places following the exchange of the peace and the presiding minister says the Prayer of the Day. The salutation may be omitted since the peace has just been exchanged. If the first Prayer

("Holy God, source of all love"), which speaks of the new commandment, is used at this point, the second prayer ("Lord God, in a wonderful sacrament"), ascribed to Thomas Aquinas and traditional for this day in the Lutheran liturgy, may be used as the post-communion prayer.

The emphasis of this service is not so much the anniversary of the institution of the Holy Communion as the new commandment of love; *Maundy* is an English form of the Latin word for commandment, *mandatum*. The over-arching theme of the day is Jesus' new commandment to "love one another even as I have loved you," a love sharply focused by the contrast of the betrayal which followed. Jesus' love is demonstrated both in his example of servanthood and in his gift of himself in Holy Communion.

It is best if one set of lessons serve all three years, for this set most adequately covers the themes of Maundy Thursday. The First Lesson is Jeremiah 31:31-34, the new covenant that God will write on the hearts of his people. The responsorial psalm is 116:10-17. The Second Lesson is 1 Corinthians 11:17-32, Paul's account of reconciliation and the Last Supper. The Gospel is John 13:1-17, 34, Jesus' washing the disciples' feet and giving the new commandment by word and example (Min. Ed. p. 138).

In response to the command of the Gospel, the washing of feet may follow (called sometimes "the Maundy"), as an exemplification of the servanthood that Jesus enjoins upon all who follow him. The use of this action provides a balance with the celebration of the anniversary of the institution of the Lord's Supper.

The group of persons (often twelve) to represent the congregation—perhaps the church council—should be selected beforehand so that they may be prepared to remove their footwear. A pitcher of water, a basin, and a towel may be placed ready for use in the washing of the feet, together with an apron or large towel for the presiding minister. Carpeting and hardwood floors should be protected with bath mats.

The presiding minister invites the group forward and may, if it has not already been done in the sermon, explain briefly the significance of the action, connecting it with Christian charity and service. The group sits on chairs placed near the altar; they remove their footwear. The presiding minister removes the cope or chasuble, stole (and surplice) and puts on the apron or towel. The minister kneels before the representatives, pours water over their feet into the basin, and dries their feet with the towel. Words are not used; nothing is said; but during the washing, "Where charity and love prevail" (126) is sung. Other hymns such as "Love consecrates the humblest act" (122), "My song is love unknown" (94), may be sung also. Assisting

ministers do not help with the washing; it is the presiding minister's task alone. When all in the group have received the ministration they return to their places. The minister again puts on the vestments.

The footwashing done, the Holy Communion continues with the Prayers. (The Creed, historically a festive element, is not used, in keeping with the solemnity of the time.) The peace, having been exchanged earlier, is omitted at this point. The liturgy of the Eucharistic Meal follows, beginning with the Offering and the Preface. The hymn, "O Lord we praise you, bless you, and adore you" (215) is appropriate during the distribution of Holy Communion.

MAUNDY THURSDAY: STRIPPING THE ALTAR

After all have received the bread and the cup, the canticle (39) is omitted. The post-communion prayer is said, either the alternate Prayer of the Day ("Lord God in a wonderful sacrament") or, if that was used earlier, "Pour out upon us the spirit of your love." Hymn 120, "Of the glorious body telling," is sung and during that hymn the sacramental vessels are cleansed and removed to the sacristy and the candles are extinguished. There is no benediction at this service, and after the hymn the congregation kneels, and the altar is stripped while Psalm 22 is sung or said. The psalm may be sung by the choir, but it is more effective if the psalm is sung or read by a single voice from the gallery, as if one were hearing the voice of Christ. The congregation should not be occupied with following the psalm in the books but rather watching the dramatic action of the stripping of the altar (which represents Christ) while listening to the words of the psalm. If Psalm 22 is to be used on Good Friday, Psalm 88, a lament in which can be heard the voice of Christ, may be used instead.

The stripping of the altar should proceed in a deliberate, orderly, unhurried fashion, with several persons carrying the items into the sacristy. It is usually best if the presiding minister gives the items to be removed to the assisting ministers and servers. The missal stand and altar book are removed. If there are altar flowers (in some places it is the custom to use flowers this once during Lent) they are removed. Candles are taken off the altar. The cross, if it is removable, is taken away. The fair linen and the paraments are removed.

No further words are said. There is no benediction, no postlude. Thus the continuity with the services of Good Friday and the Easter Vigil is suggested. It is all one extended service, from Thursday through Good Friday through the Easter Vigil. The church is left in semidarkness

and all leave the church in silence. Thus the transition is made from the eucharistic celebration to Jesus' crucifixion and death. Symbolically, Christ, stripped of his power and glory, is now in the hands of his captors.

There is a practical purpose to the stripping of the altar too. It is done so that the altar can be washed in preparation for Easter.

Traditionally, Evening Prayer is not said by those who participate in the evening celebration of the Lord's Supper on Maundy Thursday.

GOOD FRIDAY

In the larger Christian tradition the Holy Communion is not celebrated on Good Friday. Because of the triumphant, joyous tone inherent in the eucharistic action, such a celebration is inappropriate. There has been in some places a Lutheran custom of celebrating Holy Communion on Good Friday (chiefly in places influenced by the Reformed tradition), but the service often tended to become a kind of funeral service for the Lord, casting a pall of gloom over all the celebrations of the Holy Communion throughout the year and taking on a degree of sentimentality by shifting the focus of the service from the Lord and his cross to our grief at his death.²² Moreover, the logic of the continuing three-day celebration, which began on Maundy Thursday, suggests that the Holy Communion on Good Friday is unnecessary.

Seen as part of the larger celebration of the mystery of salvation, it is appropriate for Good Friday to be an austere time of reflection and intercession, as well as of the adoration of Christ, the sacrificial Lamb. This note of austerity does not, however, preclude the note of triumph as the final hymns indicate. The congregation gathers on Good Friday to *celebrate* the Lord's sacrifice on the cross.

It is most appropriate to hold this service in the afternoon near 3 p.m., the traditional hour of Jesus' death. Local circumstances may, however, indicate that another time is more suitable.

The altar is left bare of paraments, linens, and ornaments; it is not used at this service. The rite centers instead on one or more reading desks. If paraments are used at all—and they need not be—the reading desk might have a scarlet cloth. Black is permitted by the rubrics, but is less desirable. It is best not to vest the altar or the reading desks, lectern, or pulpit for Good Friday. The chancel, having been stripped on Maundy Thursday, is left bare until it is dressed for Easter.

Organ or other instrumental music should be restricted to the accompaniment of singing. If possible, the people should sing without

accompaniment. If the people bring offerings to this service, the gifts are received at the door and they are not presented at the altar.

The ministers vest in albs or surplices. It is inappropriate to wear additional vestments such as stoles, copes, or chasubles, for Good Friday is essentially a day without a proper color and only the basic garment—the alb—is worn.

GOOD FRIDAY: THE READINGS

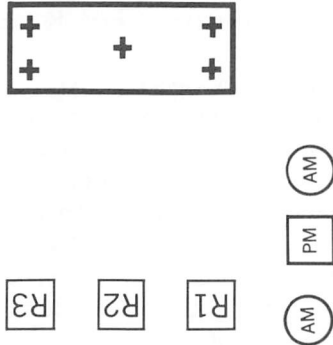
There is no opening hymn. The people stand as the ministers enter in silence and pause or kneel before the altar. (It has been traditional in some places for the ministers to prostrate themselves before the altar—to lie flat on the floor before it—or to kneel and touch the forehead to the floor.) Then they go to their places. The presiding minister says the Prayer of the Day (“Almighty God, we ask you to look with mercy on your family,” Ministers Edition, p. 139); the minister does not say “The Lord be with you” or “Let us pray.” The prayer stands alone; it is said, not intoned.

The First Lesson is read, followed by silence for prayer and meditation. Instead of a Psalm, Hymn 116 or 117, “O sacred head, now wounded,” is sung. It is a noble Lutheran contribution to the meditation upon the passion of our Lord. The liturgy calls for no Second Lesson, but the propers list Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9, which might be added if a longer service is desired. (Hebrews 4:1-16 is read in the Daily Lectionary on Holy Saturday, however.) A Second Lesson is unnecessary and usually should be omitted so as not to detract from the Old Testament reading and from the reading of St. John’s Passion.

The Gospel is announced: “The Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ according to St. John.” The usual acclamations (“Glory to you, O Lord,” “Praise to you, O Christ”) are omitted as on the Sunday of the Passion. The Passion according to St. John should be read by several readers who assume the chief roles, or it may be sung according to a setting composed for liturgical use. Is it no accident that St. John’s Passion is read on Good Friday, for the account in the Fourth Gospel of the crucifixion stresses the victory of the cross. In St. John’s Passion the glory dominates.

Because of the length of the reading (and again, as on the Sunday of the Passion, pastors and congregations are to be encouraged to use the long reading and not opt for the abbreviated one) the congregation may sit. Some, however, may choose to stand throughout the entire reading. It has been traditional, however, to stand at least for the final verses, from John

19:23 on. At the words telling of Jesus' death, "he gave up his spirit" (19:30), the reader should pause in silent meditation.²³ Following the reading of the Passion, silence is kept for prayer and meditation. Then Hymn 111, "Lamb of God, pure and sinless," a metrical form of the Agnus Dei, may be sung.



THREE READERS OF THE PASSION

A brief sermon may be preached; this is not the service for extended proclamation. The sermon must not overshadow the proclamation of the gospel in the other parts of this service, especially in the reading of the Passion and in the action with the cross at the end of the service.

The Creed, a festive addition to the service, is not used, in keeping with the solemnity of the day.

GOOD FRIDAY: THE SOLEMN PRAYERS²⁴

The Bidding Prayer for the whole family of God (Ministers Edition, pp. 139-142) has been a traditional part of the Good Friday liturgy since early times. It is led by an assisting minister from a reading desk. The presiding minister says the prayers either from the chair or from a second reading desk. If the pulpit is not too large or too high, it could serve as the second reading desk.

In traditional practice, the congregation stands for the bids and kneels for the silence and the prayer. If the silence is extended and if the prayers are read slowly and deliberately, the action of standing and kneeling and standing again need not seem too awkward. Another assisting minister (not

necessarily the one who reads the bids) may direct the action: "Let us stand," "Let us kneel." The congregation may kneel throughout the bidding Prayer. Where there are no facilities for kneeling, the congregation might sit during the entire prayer, which is more conducive to meditation. Some, nonetheless, may choose to kneel on the floor of the church.

The first two prayers are for the church and its leaders. In the second bid, the Christian names of the president of the church body and the president of the district/synod are inserted. It is appropriate to bid prayer by name for the leaders of the various Christian communities, local or world-wide: e.g., "Let us pray for John Paul, Bishop of Rome; Athenagoras, the Patriarch of Constantinople; Donald, the Archbishop of Canterbury; for _____, the Presidents of the World Council of Churches; for Josiah, President of the Lutheran World Federation; for our pastors and other ministers; for all servants of the church; and for all the people of God."

The next three prayers are for the people of God (candidates for Baptism, Christian unity, the Jews). The next two prayers are for those who are separated from the faith (those who do not share the biblical faith, those who do not believe in God). The last two prayers are for the world (those in public office and those in special need). Finally, the nine prayers are summed up in the Our Father.

The Bidding Prayer, while containing no specific reference to the cross and passion makes clear the meaning of the crucifixion: "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all people to me." A traditional prayer at noon asks Christ that "all people may look to you and be saved." The traditional collect for Good Friday, moreover, prays for "your family." The cross draws all humanity together to Christ.



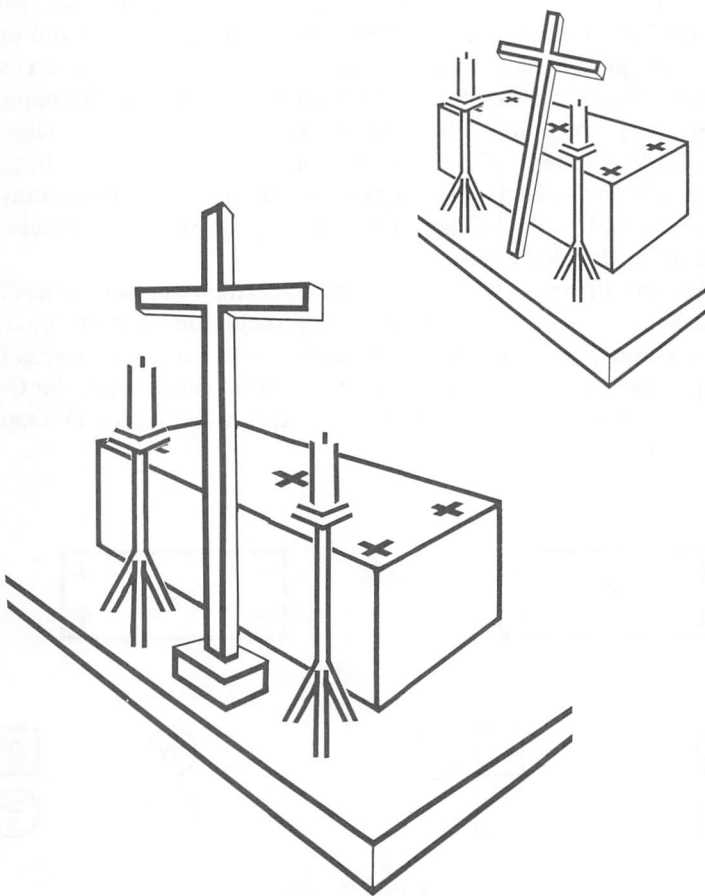
OR



AT THE SOLEMN PRAYERS

GOOD FRIDAY: THE ADORATION OF THE
CRUCIFIED

A large, rough-hewn wooden cross should be provided for use in the final portion of the service. The cross may be placed in front of the altar before the service begins; tall, lighted candles may be placed on stands on either side of the cross. The cross may rest against the top of the altar or against the communion rail or it may be placed upright in a stand. It is more effective, however, showing more



clearly the divisions of the service, if the cross is carried in procession, following the Bidding Prayer. The cross may be kept in the narthex or sacristy or other convenient place. The presiding minister carries the cross into the church; the cross may be accompanied by two torchbearers. The verse and response is sung (to one of the psalm tones) or said as the procession begins; it is repeated as the procession is halfway to the altar; it is repeated again as the procession reaches the altar. The use of this verse at these three points (stations) in the procession corresponds to the stations with the candle in the Easter Vigil procession and to the entrance with the candle in the Service of Light at the beginning of Evening Prayer. The presiding minister stops to sing the verse each time, and, if feasible, the cross is lifted each time the verse is sung. After the third station, the cross and the torches are set in front of the altar. When the cross is leaned against the altar or altar rail, care must be taken that it is secure and will not slide.

If there is no procession, the verses are simply sung or said in sequence.

The adoration of the crucified (as the Taizé liturgy calls it) is not unlike the homage paid to a sovereign at a coronation. The cross is a throne, and the people show allegiance to Christ and his rule as they kneel before the sign of salvation.

Silence is kept for meditation on the mystery of the crucified Savior, the mystery of redemption. The congregation may come forward to bow before the cross, to touch it, or to kiss it as a further sign of devotion.

The final theme of the Good Friday Service is not lament but triumph. One or both of the ancient hymns for Good Friday by Venantius Fortunatus (530-609)—“Sing, my tongue, the glorious battle” (Hymn 118); “The royal banners forward go” (Hymn 124 or 125)—are sung to extol the victory of the cross of Christ.

The concluding verse and response echoes the note of confidence:

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

There is no benediction. As on Maundy Thursday, the Good Friday liturgy is to be understood as part of the three-day celebration of the cross and resurrection, that reaches its climax in the Easter Vigil. The services of Holy Week must not be understood to be simply commemorations of historical events; they are most of all stages in the cumulative celebration of one unitive event—the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The ministers leave in silence. The cross remains in its place, the candles burning by it until the last worshiper has left the church. The congregation

should be encouraged (at a time other than the end of the service: the mood must not be spoiled by announcements) to remain as long as they can for prayer and meditation.

Traditionally, Evening Prayer is not said by those who participate in the afternoon or evening liturgy of Good Friday.

THE VIGIL OF EASTER

The climax of the sacred triduum that began on Maundy Thursday is reached in this service which abounds in archetypal imagery that evokes responses from deep within the human psyche: darkness and light, death and life, chaos and order, slavery and freedom. The cross is vindicated as the Lord's throne (already prefigured on Good Friday), and the fullness of salvation finds expression—creation and redemption, old covenant and new covenant, Baptism and Eucharist. Through the word, the sacraments are revealed as symbols of God's salvation of humanity. This most holy night is the solemn memorial of the central mystery of salvation—Christ's saving death and mighty rising.

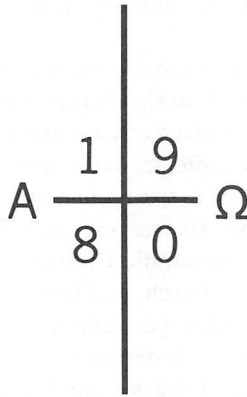
Anciently, the Vigil was a watch through the night for signs of the rising dawn. The service should be scheduled so that it extends into Easter Day, but variations are possible to meet local needs for, liturgically, the day begins with sundown. The entire Vigil may begin just before dawn on Easter Day; the first three parts (Service of Light, Service of Readings, Service of Baptism) may be celebrated on Easter Eve, leaving the Holy Communion for Easter morning; the Service of Light may be celebrated prior to the Holy Communion on Easter morning, in which case, Hymn 146, "Rejoice, angelic choirs, rejoice," may replace the Easter Proclamation, the Exsultet (Ministers Edition, pp. 144-146).

The church is prepared for Easter with white (or gold) paraments and with flowers. The ornaments are replaced on the altar and elsewhere in the church. The lighting should be managed so that prior to the Gloria in Excelsis the Easter decorations are not obvious.

The usual preparations for Holy Communion are made. The font or the ewer is filled with water; a small bough of evergreen is placed ready for use by the font for the renewal of baptismal vows. The stand for the paschal candle is centrally placed in the approach to the altar and decorated with flowers and plants at its base.

The paschal candle may be prepared prior to the service by incising in it a cross, the Greek letters alpha and omega, and the numerals of the current year. The traditional words while doing this are: "Christ yesterday and

today [cross]; the beginning and the end [Alpha and Omega]; his are all times [1] and all ages [9]; to him be glory and dominion [8], through all the ages of eternity [0]. Amen.” Thus the candle becomes a sign of the presence of Christ with his people, bearing his sign and title. This candle, which burns near the altar throughout the Great Fifty Days, represents the risen Lord shining in the splendor of his resurrection. In some liturgies, five grains of incense (representing the five wounds of Christ) are inserted into the incised cross at this point. The *Lutheran Book of Worship* rite suggests doing this during the Easter Proclamation, which was the more ancient place for the action.



EASTER VIGIL: THE SERVICE OF LIGHT

The first part of the Great Watch centers around light, the first work of the Creator, the visible token of Christ, who proclaimed himself the Light of the world and who at Easter arose, shining as the dawning sun, conquering forever the dark night of sin.

As on the Sunday of the Passion, for optimal effect, the congregation should gather in a place other than the church—in a parish house, the church basement, the porch of the church, or, if it is commodious enough, the narthex. Each person is given a candle. If the people assemble in the church, the building is kept as dark as practicable.

The ministers and their assistants, wearing purple vestments (stoles and copes), begin the service from a place near where the fire is to be kindled,

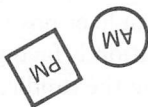
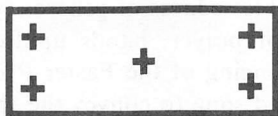
where they can be heard and from which the procession is easily begun. If it is necessary to gather in the church, the service is begun just inside the door. The congregation stands and faces the ministers.

A large fire may be built on the ground or in a large brazier filled with light, dry kindling. As at creation light came into the darkness, so at the beginning of the celebration of the new creation a fire is kindled in the darkness. The fire may be struck from flint and steel or from a match. A real fire should be kindled so that all the people can see it; it is not enough simply to strike a match and light the paschal candle. The assisting minister who is to bear the paschal candle in the procession, lights it from the large fire (a taper may be necessary to do this) while the presiding minister says, "May the light of Christ, rising in glory, dispel the darkness of our hearts and minds."

As the children of Israel were led by a pillar of fire from slavery to freedom in the promised land, so the church is led from the slavery of sin to the glorious liberty of the children of God in the heavenly land of promise. Again, a pillar of fire, the candle, leads the way. The procession forms: the paschal candle carried by the assisting minister goes first, followed by the congregation and the choir, the servers, and the ministers. (If incense is used, the thurifer precedes the candle.) The route of the procession may be around the outside of the church building or around the block before entering the church; or it may go directly down the center aisle to the chancel. A lengthy procession is desirable.

As the procession sets out, the assisting minister who carries the candle, lifts it high and sings "The light of Christ." At the church door, or halfway to the destination if the procession is entirely within the church building, the assisting minister again lifts high the candle and sings on a higher pitch, "The light of Christ." Those in the procession light their candles from the paschal candle and the light is shared with the congregation. The assisting minister, arriving at the stand for the paschal candle before the altar, turns and faces the congregation and sings a third time on a still higher pitch, "The light of Christ." The paschal candle is then placed in its stand.

Standing by the paschal candle, the assisting minister by the light of the candle sings the Easter Proclamation, the Exsultet. It is a grand and ancient song of praise, inviting first heaven then earth, then the church and this congregation to join in the praise of God. In thanksgiving significant biblical events are recalled—Adam, the Passover, the Exodus, and the resurrection. "This is the night:" time is erased and the past events live again and we are present at them all. The mystery of the candle, the light of which is not dimmed, no matter how much it is divided, is made a source of

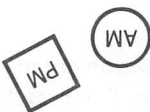
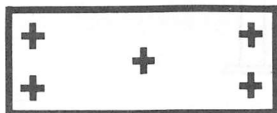


READING DESK

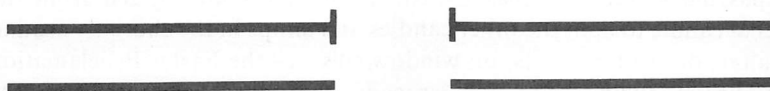
C



OR



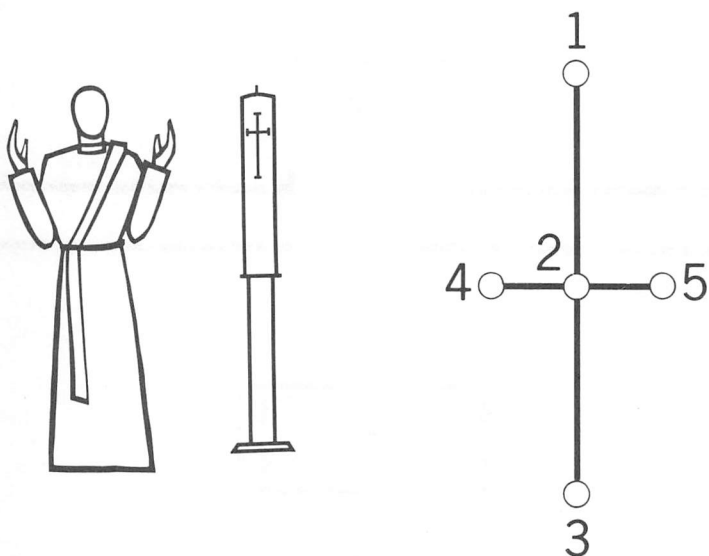
C



SINGING THE EASTER PROCLAMATION

instruction for us in the blessedness of generosity and self-sacrifice.

The biblical gesture of prayer, hands uplifted and outstretched, is appropriate during the singing of the Easter Proclamation. It is almost essential to *sing* this grand song to convey the spirit of exaltation in the text.²⁵ It should be assigned to an assisting minister who is able to sing it. If a reading desk is used for the Proclamation, it should be positioned in such a way that the minister who sings the Proclamation is facing the paschal candle. All of the ministers stand around, facing the candle, the focus of attention, for it is the light of Christ.



Two forms of the Easter Proclamation are provided. In the longer form (translated from ancient sources by Brian Helge), toward the end, five grains of incense are fixed in the candle. Commercially produced paschal candles usually have the cross, alpha and omega, and part of the date painted on them, with five holes made for the incense and five red wax nails to hold the incense in place. The number five represents the five wounds of Jesus: hands, feet, and side. It is further testimony to the fact that ritually the paschal candle becomes Christ. Then tapers are lighted from the paschal candle to light the other candles and lamps in the church—around the altar, on wall brackets, on window sills—as the Easter Proclamation continues. Slowly as the light spreads, the church emerges from the darkness and creation is experienced anew.

A brief form of the Easter Proclamation is provided also. When this form is used, other candles and lamps in the church are lighted from the paschal candle at the conclusion of the Proclamation.

When the Proclamation is finished, the people extinguish their candles and sit down. A few of the lights of the church may be turned on for the readings which follow, but it should not yet be bright.

EASTER VIGIL: THE READINGS

The focus of the service now turns from creation to Holy Baptism, and the people sit to hear the readings and to meditate on the meaning of the experience of Israel and of the church. The second part of the great vigil centers around water, an element which threatens death but is an essential ingredient of creation. Our forebears went safely through the water to new life, but their enemies drowned in it. So we pass through the waters of Baptism to drown sin and come out washed and made new children of God.

The readings present a review of the whole history of salvation. The readings should be done in semidarkness, but sufficient illumination from candles or other sources must be provided at the reading desk and for the presiding minister.

Twelve readings are provided. Consideration should be given to using them all, but according to local circumstances it may be desirable to reduce the number to seven (the holy number) or to four (the number of readings in the Roman Catholic Easter Vigil). The first lesson, the story of creation, and the fourth lesson, the story of the Exodus, are always read, and *Benedicite, Omnia Opera* ("All you works of the Lord, bless the Lord," Ministers Edition, pp. 151-152) is always sung after the last lesson.

Several assisting ministers should share in the reading of the lessons. The lessons should be introduced simply, "A reading from _____." The citation of chapter and verse is unnecessary. When the reading is concluded, the reader simply sits down. After each lesson (and the canticle, if one is appointed) silence is kept for meditation. As always, this needs to be unhurried, giving ample time to reflect devotionally upon each reading. The silence is concluded by the presiding minister praying the appointed prayer. The congregation may sit throughout the service of readings, but, especially when there are many lessons, it is helpful to stand for the prayers.

The first lesson, Genesis 1:1-2:2 (or 1:1-3:24), tells of creation, now renewed in Christ. At the first creation, the Spirit of God moved over the waters bringing order from chaos, and creation began with the coming of

light into the darkness. In the cross and resurrection of Christ the new creation begins, and it is continued in each Baptism. This lesson is the first of the four in the Roman Catholic rite.

The second lesson, Genesis 7:1-5, 11-18; 8:6-18; 9:8-13, tells of a foreshadowing of Baptism—the great flood. This old Testament “type” or antecedent is used in 1 Peter 3:19-22.

The third lesson, Genesis 22:1-18, Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac, is a foreshadowing of the sacrifice of the Son of God and suggests the death that Baptism effects.

The fourth lesson, Exodus 14:10-15:1a (or 13:17-15:1a), is the story of Israel’s deliverance at the Red Sea, a foreshadowing of the deliverance through the waters of Baptism. This lesson with the canticle which follows tells of the destruction of Israel’s enemies, just as Christ has triumphed over the powers of evil and now enables us to share his victory. This is the second lesson in the Roman Catholic Easter Vigil. The continuation of the reading, the Song of Moses and Miriam, from Exodus 15, is sung by the congregation or choir.

The fifth lesson, Isaiah 55:1-11, tells of salvation freely offered to all and gathers several biblical themes: water, Eucharist, the everlasting covenant, conversion, the word of creation.

The sixth lesson, Baruch 3:9-37, is a message of hope to a conquered people: obedience brings life. The latter part of the reading centers on the creator who commands the light and who shares his wisdom with his people. The baptismal way of death and resurrection is God’s gift of wisdom.

The seventh lesson, Ezekiel 37:1-14, tells of the valley of dry bones; their restoration to life foreshadows the resurrection.

The eighth lesson, Isaiah 4:2-6, tells of God’s presence in a renewed Israel, washing his people with cleansing water. In the church Christ’s presence is known by his baptized people. This lesson is third in the Roman Catholic Easter Vigil. The reading is followed by the Song of the Vineyard (Isaiah 5:1-2a, 7a) in which Israel is seen as God’s vine, chosen and cared for by him.

The ninth lesson, Exodus 12:1-14 (or 1-24), tells of the institution of the Passover, the festival of deliverance and preparation for the Christian Passover in which Christ the Lamb of God is sacrificed and is shared in the eucharistic meal.

The tenth lesson, Jonah 3:1-10, tells of the instantaneous and complete conversion of Ninevah after the preaching of Jonah. The lesson calls up the whole Jonah story and points to baptismal repentance for all people.

The eleventh lesson, Deuteronomy 31:19-30, is the stern warning which Moses gave to God's people, having set before them the law and the covenant of God. The reading is a preparation for the renewal of the baptismal vows and that covenant which demands of us faithfulness, obedience, and loyalty. This lesson is the last of the four in the Roman Catholic rite. The Song of Moses is sung following the reading, celebrating the power and faithfulness of the God of Israel.

The twelfth lesson, Daniel 3:1-29 (plus Additions to Daniel 46-50, 91-96, from the Apocrypha),²⁶ tells the story of the three young men who were thrown into the blazing furnace and whose survival is thought by the church to foreshadow the resurrection. The optional verses are from that section of Daniel contained in the Apocrypha, from the Greek translation of the Old Testament that supplements the Hebrew text of Daniel.

After the last lesson, there is no silence or prayer. The canticle *Benedicite, Omnia Opera*, the song the three young men sang in the blazing furnace, according to the Greek text of Daniel, is sung by the choir, a cantor, or the congregation. The canticle serves as a processional hymn during which the assisting minister carries the paschal candle to the font. The other ministers follow.

EASTER VIGIL: THE SERVICE OF HOLY BAPTISM

The great Vigil of Easter, which moves from darkness to light, from death to life, is the most appropriate time of the year for the Baptism of adults and children. Every effort, therefore, should be made to have candidates for Baptism at this service. When there are candidates for Baptism, they gather at the font with their sponsors and parents. The font is the womb of the church. As the Spirit once moved upon the Virgin Mary so that she conceived and bore the Son of God, so now we ask that in this font the church may bear new children of God.

At the font, the candidates are presented to the presiding minister who then addresses the candidates and sponsors and parents. The prayers are omitted, and the presiding minister says the Thanksgiving for water:

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give him thanks and praise.

Holy God, mighty Lord, gracious Father. . . .

The Thanksgiving is especially effective at the Easter Vigil, for it gathers

many of the Old Testament types that were presented in the lessons and puts them together with New Testament uses of water in the ministry of John the Baptist and of Jesus.

At the end of the second paragraph, “baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,” the presiding minister may with the hand divide the water in the form of a cross to suggest the parting of the Red Sea at the Exodus as well as the four quarters of the earth to which the church is sent in its mission.

At the words, “Pour out your Holy Spirit . . .,” the minister may breathe on the water in the form of a cross, as a sign of the Holy Spirit (the breath of God) moving over the water at creation.

The last paragraph of the Thanksgiving makes sense as it stands even when there are no candidates for Baptism, but some may choose to alter the next to last sentence to “Wash away the sins of all those who are cleansed in this font and bring them forth as inheritors of your glorious kingdom.” As that sentence is read, it has been customary to lower the bottom of the paschal candle into the water in the font as a sign of Christ’s death and resurrection. The candle is symbolic of Christ who goes into the water of death and emerges with new life; so those who are made his by Baptism drown the old Adam and rise as new people. Christ’s disciples thus follow where he has led the way—through Baptism and through death. The candle may be lowered once, at the words, “Wash away the sin of all those . . .,” or it may be lowered three times, at the words, “Pour out your Holy Spirit,” “give new life,” and “cleansed by this water.” Or, the candle may be lowered into the font in silence at the end of the prayer.



The presiding minister then calls for the renunciation of evil and the profession of faith. If there are no baptisms, the address might be expanded to introduce the renewal of the baptismal promises:

Sisters and brothers, on this most holy night the church keeps vigil, awaiting the glorious resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle teaches us that by baptism we were buried with Christ and lay dead in order that as Christ was raised from the dead in the splendor of the Father, so we should set our feet on the new path of life. Therefore, now that the struggle of Lent is over, let us renew the promises made at our baptism. I therefore ask you. . . .

Whether there are baptisms or not, the whole congregation should participate in the renunciation and profession at this service. It is the yearly occasion of the renewal of the baptismal vows. While Baptism is permanent and indelible and lasts forever, we need daily to return to that covenant in confession and regularly to renew the faith we profess.

During the creed, using an evergreen bough (showing eternal life) the presiding minister sprinkles water from the font in the direction of the congregation three times as a sign of forgiveness and reconciliation. Or, the presiding minister may dip the hand in the water and sprinkle the congregation, or, the assisting minister might draw water from the font and carry it in a bowl into the midst of the congregation so that the presiding minister might sprinkle the people.

If there are baptisms, the presiding minister baptizes each candidate and, remaining at the font, lays both hands on the head of each and prays for the Holy Spirit, seals each candidate with the cross, and, if it is the custom of the parish, gives the candle and white robe to each.

A litany is sung as those who have been baptized return to their places and the ministers go to their places for the Holy Communion. The litany traditionally sung at this point as the procession returned to the altar was the great Litany of the Saints, telling of the cloud of witnesses into which we have been baptized. But the Lutheran revision of that Litany does not invoke the saints, and it is too penitential a prayer for Easter. The Litany from Evening Prayer is less penitential and therefore more appropriate, but since these concerns will be repeated in the prayers of intercession in the Holy Communion, this may seem a duplication. The abbreviation of that litany from the beginning of the Holy Communion, "In peace let us pray to the Lord" (Ministers Edition pp. 196, 234, 270), is most appropriate, and using this Litany in procession as the ministers go to their places recalls its

original purpose in the entrance rite. Another litany, which invites the whole creation to lift up its voice in thanksgiving is:

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good:
For his mercy endures forever.
 Who has loved us from all eternity:
For his mercy endures forever.
 And remembered us when we were in trouble:
For his mercy endures forever.
 Who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven:
For his mercy endures forever.
 And was made flesh of the Virgin Mary and became man:
For his mercy endures forever.
 Who by his cross and suffering has redeemed the world:
For his mercy endures forever.
 And washed us from our sins in his own blood:
For his mercy endures forever.
 Who on the third day rose from the dead:
For his mercy endures forever.
 And has given us the victory:
For his mercy endures forever.
 Who ascended on high:
For his mercy endures forever.
 And opened wide for us the everlasting doors:
For his mercy endures forever.
 Who is seated at the right hand of God:
For his mercy endures forever.
 And ever lives to make intercession for us:
For his mercy endures forever.
 Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:
As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.
 For the gift of his Spirit:
Blessed be Christ.
 For the catholic church:
Blessed be Christ.
 For the means of grace:
Blessed be Christ.
 For the hope of glory:
Blessed be Christ.
 For the triumphs of his gospel:
Blessed be Christ.

For the lives of his saints:

Blessed be Christ.

In joy and in sorrow:

Blessed be Christ.

In life and in death:

Blessed be Christ.

Now and unto endless ages:

Blessed be Christ.

Blessing and honor and thanksgiving and praise, more than we can utter, more than we can conceive, be to you, O holy and glorious Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, by all angels, all humanity, and all creatures, forever and ever.

Amen.

If the sacrament is not to be celebrated until morning, the Litany is not sung, and after the renewal of the baptismal vows, the people leave the church in silence.

EASTER VIGIL: THE SERVICE OF HOLY COMMUNION

The ministers change into white or gold vestments and having arrived at their places by the altar, an assisting minister intones "Glory to God in the highest" and the congregation continues the hymn of praise. This grand song marks the dramatic transition from darkness to light, the moment when the church is fully illuminated. The contrast should be swift and striking. As the hymn of praise is sung, bells are rung (both the tower bells and hand bells), trumpets and other instruments may accompany the organ, veils are removed from crosses, statues, pictures.

For all of its excitement, this Vigil Eucharist should remain relatively simple in form and style. The more solemn and festive celebration of the Holy Communion is left for later in the morning of Easter Day. "Worthy is Christ," the Easter hymn of praise, is reserved for the Easter morning service. "Glory to God in the highest" is appointed for the Vigil because of its traditional place here in the festival services of Holy Communion and to prevent its loss in view of the popularity of "Worthy is Christ." The sequence hymn (137) is not sung until the Easter morning service, and with the return of Alleluia, the banner bearing that word which was put away on Shrove Tuesday may be brought back into the church during the singing of the sequence hymn with its alleluias.

Because of the instructional character of the Service of Readings and of the proclamation of the Gospel in the Exsultet and baptismal service, the sermon may be omitted at the Vigil Eucharist. The Creed is not said after the Hymn of the Day at the vigil because a creed was already used at the baptismal service.

Easter hymns are appropriate during the communion. Psalm 136, the "great Hallel," used by the Jews at Passover, may be sung as the post-communion canticle. The traditional post-communion prayer is "Pour out upon us, O Lord, the Spirit of your love."

After the service, the congregation may share a meal or refreshments elsewhere in the church building. The candles distributed at this service should be taken home and lighted at the family meal on Easter Day and as long as they last through the Great Fifty Days.

Traditionally, Morning Prayer is not said by those who participate in the Easter Vigil.