

March 14, 2008

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The week we call Holy stretches before us. In this week the Church celebrates some of most ancient and certainly the most beautiful rites in its treasury of spirituality. Certainly, these are the most important days of the whole church year, even though they don't get tagged as "days of obligation."

Lent ends at sundown on Thursday of this week and with the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper, the *Paschal Triduum* begins. The *Triduum* (3 days) consists of one feast which is celebrated over three days. The "three days" are numbered from sundown Holy Thursday to sundown Good Friday; from sundown Good Friday to sundown Holy Saturday; and from sundown Holy Saturday to sundown Easter Sunday. The high points of that one feast are the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper on Thursday night, the Solemn Celebration of the Lord's Passion on Friday and the Easter Vigil (the greatest and first Mass of Easter) on Holy Saturday night. (Mass on Easter Sunday is a spill over of the joy of the Triduum!) The Triduum closes with Evening Prayer on Easter Sunday night.

Yes, these liturgies are lengthy but they are also rich and beautiful in symbol, prayer, song and ritual. It is a shame that many Catholics go to their death without ever having celebrated the most important feasts of their faith!

On Holy Thursday the Evening Mass at 7:30 p.m. includes the washing of feet, a gesture which Jesus left us in St. John's account of the Last Supper. In our parish, any individual may come forward to have his or her feet washed and then to wash the feet of the next person in line. (A number of people will do this and a number of people will choose not to - it's an option and remaining in one's place and praying and singing during this time is fine, too.) At the end this liturgy, all are invited to go in procession with the Blessed Sacrament to the chapel in the lower church where the Eucharist is reserved overnight. The chapel remains open then until midnight for any who wish to come and pray.

On Good Friday a children's service will be offered at 3:00 p.m. This service is a much-simplified version of the liturgy offered in the evening at 7:30. At the Solemn Evening liturgy the gospel of the Passion of Christ is proclaimed, the annual solemn prayers of intercession are offered, the Cross is brought into the church in a procession and all are invited to come forward to venerate it; Communion is given from the sacrament reserved in the chapel from the previous evening. (The children's service is a simple version of the first three elements of the evening service; Communion is not given at the afternoon service.)

The liturgy of the Easter Vigil begins at 8:00 p.m. outdoors (parking lot entrance) with the lighting of the new fire and the Paschal Candle. A candle light procession enters the church and the *Exsultet* (hymn of Easter praise) is sung. Then there is a vigil of readings tracing salvation history up to the resurrection of Jesus. We have no baptisms to celebrate at the Vigil this year so it will be a little less lengthy than usual. After the readings we will bless the Easter water; renew baptismal promises and celebrate Easter Eucharist.

Mass on Easter morning will be at the usual times. Fr. Michael Medas will celebrate the 7:30 Mass for which I'm most grateful. Our celebration of the Triduum will conclude with Evening Prayer

at 7:00 p.m. Very few parishes offer Evening Prayer and I am pleased that we do. Easter Evening Prayer is a candle light service with song, incense, prayer and scripture. The perfect end to the greatest feast on the Christian calendar.

I received an email this week from a parishioner who told me that she had sent the following email to some of her friends:

For any of you who are looking for meaningful services during this Holy Week - OR a friend to journey thru this Holy Week with... Join me! I am extending an offer you can't beat!

***Free limo service to Holy Week services
at Holy Family Parish in Concord!***

Here's the deal...

Sunday is Palm Sunday. It kicks off Holy Week. The week concludes with the Triduum: Holy Thursday - remembering the First Eucharist; Good Friday when we reflect on Christ's sacrifice; and Easter Vigil on Saturday evening... (the first celebration of Easter with blessing of the new fire and more! And Mass on Easter Sunday morning!

This is really my VERY favorite week of the Church year! I would love to have you join me for any or all of the services. I am willing to come pick you up in my van - and treat you to a coffee afterwards. I am certain that if you attend any of these services, you will be in a much better place next week and more fully appreciate our faith and our Lord and SAVIOUR!

Please let me know if you need a ride - or if you'd like to join me there!

This is one parishioner's great idea and what a gift she is offering her neighbors and friends. Perhaps there are some folks who might come to prayer this week if YOU invited them, if YOU offered a ride, if YOU let them know that we'd love to have them join us.

Think about it! Act on it! It's a beautiful and simple way to spread the faith and draw others back to it...

Hope to see you often this week!

Sincerely,
Fr. Fleming

You're always welcome at my blog at
ConcordPastor.blogspot.com