

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Last week our parish celebrated the most important days on the liturgical calendar. Unfortunately, the majority of our parishioners were not with us for these celebrations. It was, of course, school vacation week and I'm sure many were out of town for the week. Still, Holy Week often finds most folks staying home as the parish celebrates the very heart of the Christian mystery of salvation.

These liturgies are the most beautiful and meaningful the Church has to offer. Perhaps for that same reason, they are lengthy.\* It saddens me that at our Palm Sunday liturgies, each of which ran only about 10 minutes longer than our usual hour for Sunday Mass, scores of parishioners departed the church directly from having received Holy Communion. I recognize that I have a bias in these matters, but I can't help but wonder, "What was the rush?"

*But let's move on to more positive considerations...*

Sacrament, symbol and song in the Holy Week liturgies surpass anything we celebrate the rest of the year and the worship of Holy Week is born of hard work on the part of many. Thus, the following reflection and thank you...

*On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the disciples said to Jesus, "Where do you want us to **prepare for you** to eat the Passover?" He said, "Go into the city to a certain man and tell him the Teacher says, In your house I shall celebrate the Passover with my disciples. **Make the preparations** for us there." The disciples did as Jesus had ordered, and **prepared the Passover.** (Matthew 26: 17-19; Mark 14:12-16)*

Around the world, there are people breathing a sigh of relief and relaxation as the Triduum celebrations of Holy Thursday, Good Friday and the Easter Vigil come to a close. Like the disciples before the last supper Jesus shared with them, these folks spent weeks and months **preparing for you** to celebrate the holiest days of the Christian year.

*(As I've written before: the liturgies of Holy Thursday, Good Friday and the Easter Vigil are the three greatest celebrations on our Church calendar. It's a shame that so many Catholics go to their grave having never participated in any of these liturgies.)*

So very many who help to prepare the liturgies we celebrate: Some of them are obvious to everyone because they are in the sanctuary, in the choir, welcoming you at the door, proclaiming the Word, serving at the altar; sharing the Sacrament with you. Others work quietly, ahead of time, preparing the liturgy, in and outside the sacristy, in and outside the sanctuary; cleaning the worship space; scheduling liturgical ministers; preparing worship aids; arranging flowers and the environment for worship; counting palm branches and tapers; ironing, polishing, vacuuming, sweeping and dusting; hanging banners; cleaning out pews as you leave for the people coming in for the next liturgy; and in general, worrying about things you'd never dream need to be worried about -- but that you'd notice right away if someone hadn't worried about them!

Our R.C.I.A. team met weekly to prepare the candidates for the Easter sacraments; our Spiritual Life Commissions prepared Lenten programs to enhance our spiritual preparation for Easter; Our Service and Justice Commission planned opportunities for Lenten sacrificial giving in preparation for Easter; our Youth Ministry and Faith Formation teams worked Lenten and Easter themes into their programs; those responsible for our liturgy met months ahead of time to prepare for the Triduum; music directors, musicians, choirs and cantors spent hours upon hours rehearsing; lectors spent hours preparing to proclaim the word; priest and deacons devoted themselves to becoming familiar with the ritual of these days so that they might lead the assembly and other ministers in graceful rites; preachers spent hours preparing homilies; our parish staff assisted in a host of

ways, not the least of which included answering phone calls, replying to emails, making lists, going to the printer, running copies, answering questions and making sure that the little things that can easily fall through the cracks - don't!

When things go well, it's often the pastor who gets the kind words and compliments but in hundreds of ways, the thanks should go to scores of others who work so hard to prepare and provide the time, the place, the word, the song and the materials of sacraments and rites for these holy days.

I am very grateful to the people in our own parish who serve in all these roles and ministries for their faithful devotion to the prayer and worship we offer at Holy Family. Simply put: without them: there would be no Triduum at all!

It's likely that you know many of these folks in our parish. Seek them out, speak to them after Mass, call them, email them and let them know that you appreciate all they've done -- because through their work, the Lord saves us, his people!

*And in a different vein...*

Every year, a day, indeed a week, is set apart for remembering the Shoah, the Holocaust. This year, the memorial week runs from May 1 - May 8. Concord will observe this memorial this Sunday night, May 1 at 7:30 at the Town House in Monument Square. I'm honored to have been asked again to offer a prayerful reflection at the close of the service. Such a memorial is kept because it is so easy for us to forget those things we cannot afford to forget, lest history repeat itself. I urge you to come this Sunday night and lend your presence and voice in prayer in remembering the Holocaust.

Sincerely,  
Fr. Fleming

\*Regarding Sunday liturgies that are a little longer than usual... Beginning this coming Saturday we will celebrate a series of 6 First Communion Masses over three weekends. As I've mentioned before, we celebrate First Communion in small groups at regular Sunday liturgies precisely because of the nature of what we're celebrating. Children are being welcomed for the first time into the Communion of the Sunday assembly of believers and a sacramental share in Christ's Body in the Bread and Cup of the Eucharist. About 80 children in our parish will be receiving First Communion this spring and this number allows us to celebrate in small weekend groups - for which I'm very grateful. For those who would like to have this schedule - here it is:

***First Communion Masses***

Saturday, May 7 at 5:00 p.m.

Sunday, May 8 at 9:30 a.m.

Saturday, May 14 at 5:00 p.m.

Sunday, May 15 at 11:30 a.m.

Saturday, May 21 at 5:00 p.m.

Sunday, May 22 at 9:30 a.m.