

The Triduum: A Three-Day Retreat

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Teacher/Facilitator Preparation

To say that there is an abundance of pressing concerns before the people of the world today is stating the obvious. There is so much that is vying for our attention and action. For those actively involved in fostering justice and peace, the work can be exhausting at times – physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually depleting. Where might we look for the ongoing nourishment and rejuvenation that we need to do this work? Do we see the Church’s liturgical tradition as one such source – *in fact, a vital source?*

We will soon enter into the celebration of the Sacred Triduum. It’s a remarkable time that invites us to reflect more deeply on the Paschal Mystery – Jesus’ life, death and resurrection – and on what this primary Christian symbol means for us and the life we live. The Triduum further invites us to imagine ourselves wrapped in the resplendent and provocative symbols of this three-day festival, which profoundly express what we believe. At one level, we know well these symbols; at another level, we know so little. We know of the new oils, the foot washing, the stripping of the altar; the veneration of the Cross and the starkness of Good Friday, all of which leads us to the magnificent glow of the Easter fire and the new Paschal Candle – the light of Christ that dispels our darkness.

Then there’s the storytelling – the passages from Scripture that recount God’s story and our story of God inviting us to share in the Divine life. We are on the edge of our seats and listen with the utmost attention. Then the robust singing of Alleluia! The Good News of Jesus Christ is proclaimed. We can see the catechumens of our Church, hear the trickle of the waters of baptism, and smell the sweet scent of chrism. We renew our own baptismal promises and are doused with water from the font. We share our Eucharistic meal for the first time with

the newly baptized. And then the dawn of Easter Sunday emerges – when we walk to the empty tomb with Mary Magdalene, who, like us, believed Jesus’ promise that there is more than the Cross – there is resurrection, there is life.

And let us not forget the primary liturgical symbol – the assembly – us! – we who gather to celebrate, we who continue the Christian memory of all that God has done and is doing and will do in Jesus Christ through the power of the Spirit. The other symbols come to life because God is working through us – the Body of Christ. It’s our name; it’s our identity. We, the Body of Christ, are a people who journeyed through the wilderness of Lent to encounter more deeply the Mystery of God; a people who, like Jesus, have as our tools of service a towel and a basin; a people who strive to live the new commandment of giving loving service to one another as Jesus gave to us.

We gather as a people who know pain and suffering, who know what it is to struggle and sometimes stumble under the weight of our crosses. We know what it is to forgive and to be forgiven. We gather as people redeemed by the cross of Christ, invited to live in right relationship with God. We are Spirit-filled people who embrace the Paschal Mystery, who trust the process of dying and rising. We gather as people who empty ourselves to allow the word of God to penetrate our hearts and minds and who say “Thanks be to God!” and “Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ.” Thanks and praise are offered as we become the enfleshed word of God. We gather as people who will share the Bread of Life and the Cup of Blessing and who say, “Amen! So be it!” as we are named the Body of Christ, the Blood of Christ. We are Easter people – a symbol of hope in the world, a window through which the world can see that God continues to be and will always be faithful to the covenant relationship.

Wow! There's a lot to take in! All of these rich symbols are wonderful *and familiar* – but yet unfamiliar. Isn't it amazing how in these familiar symbols, God often sneaks up on us – takes us by surprise? Suddenly, the symbols that we think we know so well confront us – they invite us to ask new questions of ourselves – as persons and as a Church. They can shake us out of our complacency, invite us to grow and live more deeply our life in Christ. Suddenly, our expectations about the symbols we will encounter are turned upside down – our experience of these familiar symbols is transformed.

Even more so, provided that we are open, that we give ourselves over to the symbols of the Church's liturgy, *we* are transformed. These symbols are our connectors – they grab our hearts and draw us more deeply into the life of the Trinity. They give us a port of entry into the invisible but real presence of the Divine. We are thus united with the Holy One. Suddenly, ordinary things of life – water, fire, bread, wine, oil, people – become extraordinary and can bring about a change in mind and heart because they help us to see and hear in new ways, to relate to life in new ways.

These three days of fasting and feasting, of proclaiming and praising, of baptizing and blessing, processing and presenting, anointing and absorbing, should leave us at once exhausted and rejuvenated - exhausted because we have poured out ourselves, emptied ourselves in order to be carried away by the power-laden symbols. Rejuvenated as this pouring out of ourselves, this offering of our very selves, of our availability to God continues as we are sent - sent to be the word of God, the Body of Christ for the world. *We are* Easter people *with work to do!*

I encourage you to invite your students/group participants into a reflective Triduum – a three-day retreat. You will hopefully find the suggestions on the next three pages helpful.

April 13, 2006

Holy Thursday

Readings:

- Exodus 12:1 – 8, 11 – 14
- Psalm 116
- 1 Corinthians 11:23 – 26
- John 13:1 – 15

Suggestion for Prayer and Journal Keeping

In John's Gospel, we see Jesus use water, a basin and a towel to abolish the inequality between him and his disciples and to give his followers the tools they need for their mission in the world. As the scripture scholar Walter Brueggemann once pointed out, tools determine and define one's trade. Christ's disciples were left with the tools of a servant, which means they can only do the work of a servant. Water, a basin, and a towel – they are used to make contact with the soiled dimensions of human life that cry out for our attention.

The towel and basin are also our tools. What demands come with these tools of discipleship and service? As you participate in the liturgy of Holy Thursday and contemplate the ritual of the foot washing, consider in what ways you are using the tools of service. In what ways could you be using these tools even more effectively to respond to the needs of others?

April 14, 2006

Good Friday

Readings:

- Isaiah 52:13-53:12
- Psalm 31
- Hebrews 4:14 – 16, 5:7 – 9
- John 18:1 – 19:42

Suggestion for Prayer and Journal Keeping:

As you participate in the Church's prayer on this Good Friday, what rituals, what symbols, what words speak to you? Identify them and reflect on why it is that these are most striking about these for you this year.



April 15, 2006

Holy Saturday

Readings:

- Easter Vigil: Genesis 1:1 – 2:2
- Psalm 104:1 – 2, 5 – 6, 1-, 12, 13 – 14, 24, 35
- Genesis 22:1 – 18
- Exodus 14:15 – 15:1
- Isaiah 54:5 – 14
- Isaiah 55:1 – 11
- Baruch 3:9 – 15, 32 – 4:4
- Ezekiel 36:16 – 17a, 18 – 28
- Romans 6:3 – 11
- Matthew 28:1-10

Suggestion for Prayer and Journal Keeping:

We begin the Great Fifty Days with the celebration of the Easter Vigil tonight. There are many powerful symbols in the liturgy that can carry us away and transform us – the Easter fire in the dark of night, the Paschal Candle, the passages from Scripture recounting our salvation story, the waters of baptism, the sweet smell of oil, the catechumens of our Church, the renewal of our baptismal promises, the sharing at the Lord’s table with one another, and the robust singing of Alleluia!

There’s another symbol which we might overlook – *us!* *The assembly, we who gather as the Body of Christ.* Assembly is essential to our Christian identity. We affirm for one another who we are and who we are called to be. We are also symbols of hope for the world – we show that the people of God are open to further deeds of God. We gather as people who have as their tools a towel and basin, who strive to live the new commandment of giving loving service to one another Jesus gave to us. We gather as people who strive to give freely – no debts, no return, no expectations – only the desire for the good of the other.

We bring the everyday rhythm of the Paschal Mystery, the “stuff” of real life, death and resurrection to the liturgy – to be united with Christ’s own self-offering. We participate in Christ’s own life. We proclaim and commemorate what God is doing for the whole world – that God is always faithful to God’s promises. We are a people transformed – people being made and re-made. And just as the risen and exalted Christ was poured out upon his Church, so must we – the assembly – be poured out upon the world. We are Easter people.

Pay special attention to the assembly – the Body of Christ gathered. Whom do you see? What do you hear? How do you carry out your responsibility as a member of the liturgical assembly?

March 27, 2005

Easter solemnity

Readings:

- Acts 10:34a, 37 – 43
- Psalm 118:1 – 2, 16 – 17, 22 – 23
- Colossians 3:1 – 4 or 1 Corinthians 5:6b – 8
- John 20:1 – 9 or Matthew 28:1-10
- Afternoon or Evening Mass: Luke 24:13 – 35

Suggestion for Prayer and Journal Keeping:

Easter is not one Sunday of the year. It's Fifty Days! What will you do for Easter this year to mark this fifty-day time of festivity? How will you keep Easter? How will you *live* as an Easter person?

