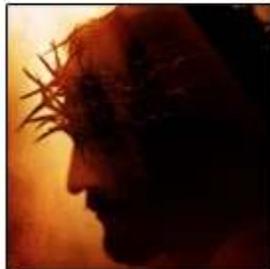


Easter Triduum



“What, really, do the liturgies of the Triduum celebrate? Most all of us believe we know the answer. We assume that Thursday commemorates the day Jesus instituted the Eucharist; Friday commemorates the day he was executed on the Cross; and the Vigil commemorates his emergence from the tomb. We assume, further, that the liturgies of these days are dramatic “reenactments” of events—which happened during Jesus’ last days and culminated in his victory over death. We assume, in other words, that the Pascal Triduum is simply spring’s parallel to winter’s Christmas. As it gathers on these days, the liturgical assembly is often thought to be engaged in acts of historical “reconstruction” that recreate scenes in the “Upper Room,” on Calvary, and at the tomb. People are encouraged to imagine they are “actually present” at these events—comforting Jesus during his fearful watch in Gethsemane, walking with him along the Via Crucis, and witnessing his miraculous “return to life” on Easter Morning. This view may frequently be reinforced by popular hymns that focus on the “historical facts” of the celebration.

But is “history” the central focus of celebration during the Triduum? Precisely because these faith-anchoring events are historical, however, they cannot be repeated or “reenacted.” That is why the Church’s long tradition insists that what happened once in history passes over into the mystery of the assembly’s liturgical/sacramental celebrations. What the Pascal Triduum actual celebrates is mystery. The liturgies of these days do not “take us back” to the Upper Room or the path to Calvary. Their ultimate purpose is not to retrace or relive the last hours of Jesus’ death—nor to catch a sign of him emerging from the tomb at Easter’s dawning. They celebrate not what once happened to Jesus, but what is now happening among us as a people called to conversion, gathering in faith, and gifted with the Spirit of holiness. They celebrate God’s taking possession of our hearts at their deepest core, recreating us as a new human community; broken like bread for the world’s life—a community rich in compassion, steadfast in hope, and fearless in the search of justice and peace” (“The Three Days of Pascha”, by Nathan Mitchel).

“Since Christ accomplished his work of human redemption and of the perfect glorification of God principally through his Pascal Mystery (in which by dying he has destroyed our death, and by rising restored our life), the sacred Pascal Triduum of the Passion and Resurrection of the Lord shines forth as the high point of the entire liturgical year. Therefore, the preeminence that Sunday has in the week, the Solemnity of Easter has in the liturgical year. The Pascal Triduum of the Passion and Resurrection of the Lord begins with the evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper, has its center in the Easter Vigil, and closes with Vespers (Evening Prayer) on the Sunday of the Resurrection” (Ordo Universal Norms, 18-19).