

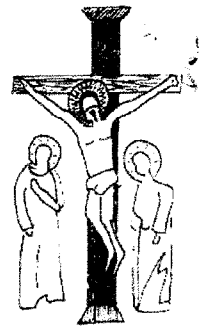


As I wrote in this column last week, it is toward evening on Holy Thursday that Lent ends and the Church enters the *Paschal* or *Easter* Triduum. The Church will gather a number of times to pray and celebrate in ritual over these days, the highpoint being the Great Vigil of Holy Saturday night, beginning in

darkness with the kindling of the Easter fire. In the Easter Triduum, we will celebrate the paschal movement of Christ to the Father, and the movement of ourselves to the font of Baptism...where we share in his dying and rising. As St Paul writes, *When you were baptised, you went into the tomb with Christ...*

The Triduum is one celebration spread over three days. At the Mass of the Lord's Supper concludes on Holy Thursday you will notice that there is no "*Go in peace*", no dismissal, we are instead invited to *keep the vigil* with the Lord - spiritually as if in Gethsemane - but in reality at the *Altar of Repose* in adoration of his sacred body. When we gather in the afternoon of Good Friday the liturgy takes up where Thursday night's left off - it is a continuation of the one celebration of the Paschal Mystery. The Passion Liturgy that Friday is not a Mass; indeed the Church has never celebrated the Eucharist on Good Friday. Rather, it is an intensely rich Liturgy of the Word which *rises* to the very poignant, once-a-year ritual of the unveiling and the veneration of the Cross.

The Liturgy of the Word opens with the fourth *Song of the Suffering Servant* taken from the Book of Isaiah, a prophecy perfectly fulfilled in Jesus. Read it in Isaiah 52:13—53:12. Psalm 30 responds to that reading, the Lectionary compilers skillfully combining Jesus' cry of *Father, into your hands, I commend my spirit* with the plaintive pleas of the Psalmist in his suffering, knowing that his salvation is in God, even when he is rejected as a "*reproach, an object of scorn to my neighbours and of fear to my friends*". And this Liturgy of God's Word reaches its climax in the solemn proclamation of the Passion Narrative of Saint John the evangelist.



John's Good Friday story embraces heaven earth. Close to the cross of Jesus stands Mary and the *Beloved Disciple*. They stand close enough to hear and see and touch. There are few words at Calvary: Good Friday is a day marked by silence, "concertina-d" in the liturgy by the long silent introduction to the Passion liturgy. Indeed *Silence* is integral to the three days - they demand time, rhythm and atmosphere. Mary is the epitome of silence at the cross. The Gospel of John says that Jesus last words were "It is done". Accomplished. Mary in her silence is not passive but **receptive** to all that has been done. *They look on the one who had been pierced* - in the liturgy we are called close to the cross, to feel its wood, its weight, its power, and to ponder the broken body. Mary had to receive and cradle the broken body of her son into her arms. She holds the broken body of Christ for the world, and our understanding of faith is that she continues to do so.

And so, on this day each year we come forward, publicly yet humbly, to venerate the cross. Appropriate music accompanies this action: we are first invited to *Behold the wood of the cross* and sing in response *Come, let us worship*, and then in wonderful ancient poetry placed on the lips of Jesus, he pleads with his people, "*What have I done to you, how have I offended you? Answer me!*" Over and over, the Lord identifies himself as the God of the Exodus, saying *I led you out of Egypt from slavery to freedom, I opened the sea before you, I gave you manna from heaven..... but you have led your Saviour to the cross.*



After the veneration of the Cross, we are invited to share in Holy Communion, from bread consecrated the evening previous, at the Mass of the Lord's Supper. The liturgy concludes in silence.