

# FAITHFUL *Celebrations*

MAKING TIME FOR GOD FROM  
MARDI GRAS THROUGH PENTECOST

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## Chapter 3

# HOLY WEEK

### Introduction

During Holy Week the church dramatizes the events leading up to and including the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross. Holy Week begins with the Sunday of the Passion, or Palm Sunday, and the joyous triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and ends with the Triduum (*Triduum Sacrum*, meaning in Latin “the sacred three days”), which begins with the celebration of the Eucharist on Maundy Thursday and ends with the vespers of Easter Sunday evening.

Each day of Holy Week is considered a “red letter” feast day, and many churches offer special services each noonday or evening to commemorate this last day of Jesus’s life. Thursday and Friday of Holy Week are especially significant. The name Maundy Thursday comes from the Latin *mandatum* or “commandment,” from the words attributed to Jesus in the Gospel of John: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another” (John 13:34). Good Friday commemorates the crucifixion of our Lord. It is known as “Good” because of the new life brought about by Christ’s victory of the cross. Holy Saturday is a time for reflecting upon Jesus’s death and burial and what it means for our lives. It is the calm after the storm as we await the sunrise.

## Love and Sacrifice

The principal theme of Holy Week is Jesus's passion: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13). Jesus gives his life to save us from sin and death.

The language of sacrifice is difficult to understand. The New Testament draws heavily on the sacrificial practices of the temple in describing the unique role of Jesus in bringing salvation through the cross. Pascal lambs were sacrificed at Passover, and Jesus's death on the cross was seen in the light of that temple practice.

During Holy Week it is also important to see the cross from the perspective of the love that God has for us. Jesus's death on the cross shows us how much God loves us, for in the words of Paul, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor death, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38–39). It is because we share in Christ's victory over sin and death that we face the cross with feelings of sadness and remorse, but also with deep thankfulness for what we have been given. Good Friday is about triumph.

## Holy Week with Children

Talking about death and grief with children is critical to their faith, however, and even though it is Holy Week and not yet Easter it is necessary to give the proclamation, "Christ has died and Christ is risen from the dead" to small children. This is the time to instill in them through prayer and practice the importance of Holy Week in their faith. For example, you might want to do a "foot washing" at home in a special way after sharing the story of Jesus and the Last Supper. You might attend a Good Friday service as a family. Talk about how sad the disciples and Mary the Mother of Jesus must have been to see Jesus die, but there was a promise Jesus needed to complete. Attend an Easter Vigil service and remind them of the story of our salvation, from Old Testament times to the present. Act out the Good Friday/Easter story the same way children often reenact the Christmas story.