

Easter Triduum Lesson

Lesson Goal: This lesson's goal is for the students to have a greater understanding of what takes place at church during each of the celebrations during the Easter Triduum. The ultimate goal is that the students will desire to attend these celebrations and experience them for themselves.

(Teacher's Note: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday have their own videos and lessons available on Catholic Brain to discuss each special feast in greater detail.)

Overview: The Easter Triduum is a way of remembering the death and resurrection of Jesus. The Easter Triduum takes place during Holy Week and lasts for three full 24-hour days. Triduum is Latin for "three days". The Easter Triduum begins Holy Thursday evening and lasts until Easter Sunday evening, which is exactly three days. The Triduum includes the feasts of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday (including the Easter Vigil), and Easter Sunday.

Pre-Video Discussion: Take a few moments with your students to have them briefly share what they already know about the Easter Triduum. More specifically, what happens at church during each celebration of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter Vigil, and Easter Sunday. Each of these will be discussed in greater detail on the Catholic Brain video which the students will watch shortly, but is discussed here briefly to see how much the students already know.

Watch "The Easter Triduum" on Catholic Brain

Comprehension and Discussion Questions:

Note: These questions are asked after the video to check student comprehension and to clarify and further discuss and explain what was seen on the video.

1) What does Triduum mean?

Triduum is a Latin word meaning "three days". The Easter Triduum begins at sundown on Holy Thursday and continues for three days until sundown on Easter Sunday.

2) What are we celebrating during the Easter Triduum?

We are celebrating the events surrounding the death and resurrection of Jesus. It includes: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday (Easter Vigil), and Easter Sunday.

3) The Easter Triduum begins with the Holy Thursday Mass. Holy Thursday recalls The Last Supper Jesus had with His apostles. What special ceremony does the priest do after the homily during Holy Thursday Mass?

The priest will have a foot washing ceremony. The priest, who is taking the place of Jesus at the Last Supper, will wash the feet of twelve parishioners, who represent the twelve apostles. During the time of Jesus, they wore sandals and their feet were quite dusty. It was a sign of hospitality to wash someone's feet when one entered a house. Jesus was showing His apostles service and humility by washing their feet. He was showing them and us by example how they were to serve others.

4) Holy Thursday Mass ends differently than a regular Sunday Mass. How does Holy Thursday Mass end?

The tabernacle is empty and the Eucharist is processed to the "altar of repose", which is an altar that is away from the main altar where the Eucharist is usually placed. The people can then stay in Eucharistic Adoration while the Blessed Sacrament is in repose on this altar. After Jesus finished the Last Supper, He went with His apostles to the Garden of Gethsemane. While there, the apostles were asked by Jesus to watch and pray with Him before He was to be arrested. By staying with Jesus in Adoration, we can be like the apostles - watching and praying with Jesus.

5) Good Friday is the day Jesus died on the cross for us. How does the inside of the church look on Good Friday?

The church is very bare. After Holy Thursday Mass, everything is "stripped" from the altar. That means anything that can be moved was removed from the sanctuary. The tabernacle is open and empty. There are no consecrated hosts in the tabernacle, so the sanctuary candle, which normally tells us Jesus is present in the tabernacle, is not lit. This is all to show the emptiness we feel when we do not have Jesus with us. Jesus has gone off to His death. This is also why Mass is not celebrated this day. It is a solemn day of mourning that we no longer have Jesus.

6) What happens during the Good Friday service?

First, it is not a Mass. This service is called the Liturgy of Our Lord's Passion. There will be a reading from a gospel on Jesus' Passion, Veneration of the Cross, and Holy Communion. During Veneration, the priest holds a cross as the people come forward,

like they do for Holy Communion, and each shows reverence to the cross by either bowing or kissing. Consecrated Hosts from Holy Thursday are also distributed.

7) On Holy Saturday Jesus is in the tomb. Again, there is no Mass celebrated in the morning - Jesus is not with us. However, later in the evening when it is dark, the Easter Vigil Mass is celebrated. It is the first Mass celebrating Jesus' resurrection. It is the longest Mass of the year but a most beautiful Mass because so much is going on. What are the four parts of this most glorious Mass of the Church?

Service of Light - A fire is lit outside but inside the church is dark. The new Paschal Candle is processed into the dark church. Then the light from the Paschal candle is used to light the candles that each person in the church is holding. This light symbolizes Jesus overcoming darkness and death. This new Paschal candle will be lit every Sunday through the Ascension.

Liturgy of the Word - Key stories from the Old and New Testament are read. There are many more readings than the usual Sunday Mass.

Liturgy of Baptism - The Easter water is blessed. At this time those entering into full communion with the Catholic Church are baptized. All others will renew their baptismal vows. Water is used at baptism because it shows us how baptism cleanses, destroys, and gives life. At our baptism we are cleansed of sin, we die with Christ so we can rise again with Him, and we are born into the Church and become sons and daughters of God.

Liturgy of the Eucharist - This is the first Mass that has been celebrated since Holy Thursday evening. Once again the priest changes the bread and wine into Jesus' Body and Blood.