Lent and Easter - A Pastoral Guide

Lent

Keeping the Spirit of Lent
The Lenten season has a dual character: to prepare catechumens and the faithful to celebrate the paschal mystery. Catechumens will focus on the rite of election, the scrutinies, and the other rites and catechesis that will prepare them for the sacraments of Christian initiation. The faithful, ever more attentive to the word of God and prayer, and supportive of the catechumens and candidates, prepare themselves by penance for the renewal of their baptismal promises. Care should be taken to preserve the spirit or tone of Lent.

Eucharistic Prayers. The Eucharistic Prayers of Reconciliation are very appropriate during Lent. The current edition of the Roman Missal includes these Eucharistic Prayers, in the Appendix to the Order of Mass.

Liturgical Music. The use of musical instruments is permitted only to support the singing of the assembly (GIRM, no. 313). Exceptions to this rule are the fourth Sunday of Lent (Laetare Sunday), and solemnities and feasts that take the place of a Lenten weekday. The Gloria is not sung or recited during Lent until Holy Thursday, except for the solemnities and feasts. The Alleluia is not used until the Easter Vigil. Lent might also be highlighted by greater use of silence during the liturgy (see GIRM, 45).

Environment & Art

Flowers: During Lent, the altar and sanctuary are not to be decorated with flowers (GIRM, No. 305). The exceptions to this rule are the fourth Sunday of Lent (Laetare Sunday), and solemnities and feasts.

Veiling crosses: After the Holy Thursday liturgy, any cross that cannot be removed from sight should be covered with a red or violet cloth in preparation for the veneration of the cross on Good Friday. The Roman Missal allows (but does not require) the veiling of crosses and images beginning after Masses on the Saturday of the Fourth Week of Lent.

Baptismal fonts: Filling baptistry and holy water fonts with sand during Lent is not appropriate. Preparation for baptism, and therefore a deep baptismal
spirituality, is a fundamental focus of the Lenten season. Fonts should contain water throughout Lent, until after the Holy Thursday Mass of Our Lord’s Supper.

Celebrations of the Sacraments during Lent

Sacraments of Initiation: Because Lent in its rituals, scriptures, history, and place in parish life is oriented toward the celebration of the sacraments of initiation at the Easter Vigil, the sacrament of baptism should not be celebrated during Lent except in cases of real necessity. It is certainly inappropriate to celebrate adult baptism during Lent, except, of course, in danger of death. The baptism of infants is also far more fitting on Easter Sunday and during the Easter season.

Rite of Penance: The celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation during Lent should be clearly and positively encouraged. It is customary that confession schedules are expanded in preparation for Easter.

It is appropriate for the sacrament of reconciliation to be celebrated during Lent in a more solemn form, as described in the Rite of Penance. Additionally, the only ordinary way for the faithful to reconcile themselves with God and the Church is through individual, integral confession and absolution (Rite of Penance, no. 31). Ideally, the faithful will have celebrated the sacrament of reconciliation before the Triduum begins. Proper catechesis should be provided to all parishioners about the liturgical reasons for this. All in the faith community should know that Lent is the time for celebrating the sacrament of reconciliation, and that Lent ends on Holy Thursday afternoon. Parish confession schedules ought to reflect our liturgical beliefs, giving reasonable opportunity for receiving the sacrament during Lent. However, it is a reality that some people may look for the opportunity to celebrate reconciliation in the final days before Easter.

Rite of Marriage: If marriages are celebrated during Lent, couples are to be reminded that wedding plans must respect the nature of the liturgical season. Please refer to the sections on Liturgical Music and Environment & Art, above.

Lent and RCIA: The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), with its catechumenate period and its various stages and rituals, is encouraged for every parish of the Diocese. Liturgical planners and ministers should become thoroughly familiar with the RCIA, so that Lent and the Triduum may be celebrated as fully and richly as possible.

All parishes with catechumens are to participate in the Rite of Election. These celebrations occur at the beginning of the Lenten season in various parts of Idaho. Gathered with the Bishop, the faithful and the elect mark the beginning of the period of final, more intense preparation for the sacraments of initiation, during which the elect will be encouraged to follow Christ with greater generosity, and conform themselves more fully to the way of the Gospel.
When there are catechumens present, the scrutinies are to be celebrated on the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays of Lent. Readings are from cycle A of the Lectionary. See RCIA no. 146. The ritual prayers for the Scrutinies are found in the Missal and may be used in place of the seasonal prayers if desired. Information on particular days and celebrations follow.

**Ash Wednesday**

Ash Wednesday is the Church’s solemn call to keep the season of Lent. We accept this call, united with the catechumens, and recalling our own baptism as we enter this special time of prayer and penitential practice.

Ashes are blessed and distributed after the homily of the Mass. Deacons or lay persons may be designated to help distribute the ashes. Two options are provided for the prayer accompanying the distribution of the ashes.

**The Chrism Mass**

This year, the Chrism Mass will be celebrated on Tuesday evening, **March 15th, at 7 pm** at the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist. At this liturgy the Oil of the Sick, Oil of Catechumens, and the Sacred Chrism are blessed by the Bishop and distributed for use in all our parishes and faith communities.

**Passion Sunday (Palm Sunday)**

**Introductory Rites.** On this day the Church “celebrates Christ’s entrance into Jerusalem to accomplish his paschal mystery” (*Roman Missal*). The memorial of this event is to be included in every Mass. The *Roman Missal* provides three forms for the memorial of the Lord’s entrance, so these rites and their rubrics should be studied carefully as ministers, planners and musicians prepare the liturgy. Although the Procession should take place only once (before the principal Mass), the Solemn Entrance may be used before the principal Mass if the Procession cannot be held.

The prayers for the blessing of the palms are used whenever the Procession or the Solemn Entrance is celebrated; the penitential rite of the Mass is then omitted.

**Reading the Passion.** Readers and pastoral musicians are encouraged to study the rubrics for the proclamation of the Passion. There is a Gospel Acclamation as usual, and a deacon receives the blessing as usual (lay readers do not receive a blessing). Omitted are candles and incense, the greeting and response (“The Lord be with you...”), the making of the sign of the cross on the book, forehead, lips, and breast, and the people’s response (“Glory to you, Lord”). Since this is a reading from the Gospel, the appropriate posture for the assembly during the reading of the Passion is standing.

The deacon and/or priest may be assisted by lectors in the reading of the
Passion on Palm Sunday and Good Friday. As always, but especially on these days, the lectors chosen for this should be well-trained and highly proficient in the proclamation of the Word.

The Liturgies of the Easter Triduum

The rites for Holy Thursday, Good Friday and the Easter Vigil are to be used in the form in which they are presented in the Roman Missal and Lectionary. These are the Church’s most sacred rites, and as the Church’s ministers, we owe it to our people to celebrate these rites exactly as they have been handed down to us.

These days — from Thursday evening through Sunday afternoon — are to be a time apart: “The Easter Triduum of the passion and resurrection of Christ is thus the culmination of the entire liturgical year” (General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar, no. 18). Those responsible for liturgy should see to it that the liturgies of these days are characterized by care and dignity, by simplicity, and by that deep joy which is announced in the entrance song of Holy Thursday: “We should glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, for he is our salvation, our life and our resurrection.”

The very heart of the Triduum is the Easter Vigil, for there the fasting, prayer, and scripture reading culminate in the celebration of initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. Planners should therefore give first attention to the liturgy of the Easter Vigil, then to the liturgical services of Holy Thursday and Good Friday. Other devotional services, e.g., Stations of the Cross, rosaries, etc., should in no way detract from the preparation of music and liturgy for the rites of Lent, the Triduum, and Eastertime.

Funerals during Triduum. A funeral Mass may not be celebrated on Holy Thursday (even before the celebration of the Mass of the Lord’s Supper), Good Friday, Holy Saturday, or Easter Sunday. If needed on these days, the body of the deceased may be brought to the church for the rite of final commendation, including the incensation and blessing of the body with holy water. Other appropriate prayers may also be added. The funeral Mass for the deceased should be celebrated as soon as convenient after Easter Sunday. At this funeral liturgy, the final commendation would be omitted.

Marriages during Triduum. The Rite of Marriage may not be celebrated on Good Friday or Holy Saturday.

Holy Thursday

Number of Masses. The Evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper should be celebrated at the most suitable evening hour. There may be a liturgy on Thursday morning only “for those who are in no way able to take part in the evening Mass.” This would discourage school Masses, but it would be appropriate for children to take part in other services marking the end of Lent.
and the approach of the Triduum. Thus, the ideal is a single Holy Thursday Mass in a parish, and only the inability of the space to accommodate those who wish to attend should suggest the possibility of a second Mass. In no way should the scheduling of a second liturgy cause either liturgy to be rushed.

The private celebration of any Mass is strictly forbidden.

**Empty Tabernacle** The tabernacle should be empty before the liturgy begins. Enough bread should be consecrated at this Mass for Holy Communion today and tomorrow. Consecrated wine is not to be reserved for distribution on Good Friday. Though Holy Communion may be brought to the sick today, Holy Communion may be distributed at the church itself only within the Mass.

**Parts of the Mass** The custom of receiving the newly blessed oils can be incorporated into the Mass of the Lord’s Supper. The washing of feet (Mandatum) is encouraged in all parishes. This rite should be characterized by its simplicity, allowing the beautiful gesture of service to speak to all of ministry in the church. The Mandatum itself is a powerful sign of our love and commitment to one another and of the nature of that commitment. We must resist the temptation to replace the Mandatum with something “more appropriate” or “more relevant,” remembering that Peter, too, thought that the washing of feet was inappropriate for the Last Supper liturgy. The group whose feet are washed should represent a cross-section of the local community. The number is traditionally twelve, though there is no exact requirement. The priest should wash the feet.

Other rites and statements of commitment are not appropriate at the liturgy of Holy Thursday, for they would not find support from either the rites or from the scriptures. Rituals for the commissioning of extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist, parish officers, or even renewal of priestly vows, are best celebrated on the feast of the patron of the parish, on the parish anniversary, or at some other time.

Following the Prayer after Communion, the Holy Eucharist is transferred to the place of reposition. This may be the regular tabernacle if it is in an area removed from the sanctuary. The Blessed Sacrament is never to be reserved in a monstrance during this time. The rite for this procession is described in the Sacramentary.

After the transfer of the Holy Eucharist, the altar is stripped privately, and any crosses are removed or covered with a red or purple veil. Lamps should not be lit before images of saints. Holy water is removed from all fonts, to be refilled with water blessed at the Easter Vigil. They should not be filled with sand.

“The faithful should be encouraged to continue adoration before the Blessed Sacrament for a suitable period of time during the night, according to local circumstances, but there should be no solemn adoration after midnight” (Sacramentary). In fact, the nature of the Triduum before the Easter Vigil is that of prayer and watching and anticipation. Fasting is one expression of this. Another is private and communal prayer. Thus, on Thursday night, even after the hours of formal adoration, the faithful might be encouraged to come at any and
all hours to the church to watch and pray between Thursday night and the Easter Vigil.

**Passover Seder**  We must recognize, as Christians, that the Eucharist is our holy ritual meal, and that we should refrain from appropriating the Jewish Passover Seder, which we cannot, in full conformity with our faith, be celebrated without major and likely inappropriate adaptations. Healthy ecumenical and interfaith relations require respect for the religious heritage of others and the integrity of their rituals. Roman Catholics, traditionally sensitive to any perceived abuse of their own sacred rites and symbols, should surely understand this. Likewise, we should not appropriate the Passover Seder and adapt it for our own purposes.

**Good Friday**
The Good Friday liturgy is a part of the *Triduum*, which is one great feast celebrated over three days; it is not just an elaborate “Communion service.” The Good Friday liturgy may never be abandoned, reordered, or replaced by other rites or services, including ecumenical services.

**Celebration of the Lord’s Passion**  The celebration of the Lord’s Passion should take place about 3pm, but for pastoral reasons may be at a later hour, or as early as 12 noon. In any case, the celebration should conclude by 9pm. The service may be repeated only when the number wishing to attend would be too large for the church. See the guidelines for the reading of the Passion in the section on Passion Sunday, above.

**Veneration of the cross**  A cross or crucifix may be used for the veneration. The Roman Missal directs that only one cross should be used in the veneration. During the veneration, music planners should avoid selections that offer facile sentiment, as the spirit of the ritual of veneration has no place for this type of music or song.

After the veneration, the cross is positioned near the altar and four candles are placed near it. The cross will remain there and the candles will remain lit for a period of time following the service to allow the faithful to spend some additional time in prayer before the cross.

**Communion**  Holy Communion is distributed only within the liturgy of the Lord’s Passion, but may be taken to the sick at any time this day.

**After Communion**  After the Blessed Sacrament has been returned to its place of reservation, the presider says the Prayer Over The People from the Roman Missal. Then, all depart in silence. As mentioned above, the cross (with lighted candles) remains available for private prayer for a period of time. The altar is stripped at a convenient time.
Holy Saturday
Holy Communion may be given on this day only as Viaticum. Ordinary Communion visits to the sick should be made earlier in the week and on Easter. Communion visits are not permitted on this day, nor are Masses, even funeral Masses. The absence of these liturgical celebrations is in keeping with the nature and mood of this day.

The Easter Vigil
The tabernacle is empty for the Easter Vigil. All bread that will be used for Holy Communion is to be consecrated at the Vigil, offering us the model of what should happen at every celebration of the Eucharist throughout the year.

Time of celebration  “The entire celebration of the Easter Vigil takes place at night. It should not begin before nightfall; it should end before daybreak on Sunday” (Roman Missal). The Circular Letter Concerning the Preparation and Celebration of the Easter Feasts, issued by the Vatican in 1988, is even stronger by insisting that the Easter Vigil must start only after it is dark. The Bishops’ Committee on Liturgy (BCL) Newsletter, March 2001, states the Easter Vigil “is to take place in darkness... that is, after the time in the evening when daylight is last visible. Thus, each pastor needs to make the appropriate determination for his parish. For the celebration of the Vigil in 2016, parishes may not start the liturgy earlier than 8:30 p.m. in the south, and 8:00 p.m. in the north.

Order of celebration. The rites of the Vigil are to be celebrated in the order in which they appear in the Roman Missal and RCIA. Parts of the Easter Vigil liturgy are never to be celebrated at other times on Holy Saturday, nor are they to be repeated at the Masses of Easter Sunday.

New paschal candle. Each year a new paschal candle is to be used. It should be made of wax and worthy in size and in beauty, befitting its role in the liturgy of this night, throughout the Easter season, and at the celebrations of baptism and burial throughout the year. Candles that are metal or plastic forms “refilled” by smaller candles are inconsistent with the candle’s symbolic role, and so are not allowed.

Liturgy of the Word. The reading of the word of God is, in the words of the Roman Missal, “the fundamental element of the Easter Vigil.” Though the number of readings from the Hebrew Scriptures may be reduced from seven to three, this is not to be done lightly. No one should look at this night’s liturgy as simply a “long Mass.” It is a Vigil, and should be conducted as such (with appropriate catechesis through the bulletin, etc., beforehand). The readings and psalms should be given the greatest care in preparation and celebration.

The parts unique to the Vigil which should always be sung are:
• the acclamations during the procession with the paschal candle;
• the Easter Proclamation (Exsultet);
• the Gospel alleluia acclamation;
• the Litany of the Saints; and
• the acclamation after the blessing of water.

**Sacraments of initiation.** The planning for the baptismal liturgy should provide for its beauty and for the full preparation and participation of the assembly. Planners and ministers will have to work with both the *Roman Missal* and the *RCIA* ritual books.

Those who are baptized at the Easter Vigil are to be confirmed immediately afterwards by the presiding priest at the Easter Vigil liturgy. These confirmations may not be postponed to a later time. Baptism and confirmation are proper to the presiding priest’s ministry, and may not be delegated to another priest nor to a deacon.

**Easter Sunday**

**Sequence**  The Easter Sequence is sung or said on Easter Sunday after the second reading and before the Alleluia. The Sequence is also optional throughout the octave of Easter.

**Renewal of Baptismal Promises**  In the United States, the renewal of baptismal promises replaces the Creed on Easter Sunday. This is followed by a sprinkling of the people with the water that was blessed at the Easter Vigil.

**Dismissal**  At the conclusion of the Mass, the deacon should dismiss the people with a dismissal form that includes a double alleluia. The double alleluia is also to be used for the dismissal at all Masses throughout the octave of Easter.

**The Easter Season**

The *Triduum* is concluded liturgically with Evening Prayer on Easter Sunday. The *Triduum* leads us to the Easter season, the fifty days from Easter Sunday until after Evening Prayer on Pentecost Sunday. This is the Church’s most ancient season and, now that the full rites of Christian initiation are restored, it may again be possible for Eastertime to be kept as a special season for Catholics, with its music, customs, and cycle of scriptures.

**Octave of Easter**  All of the days in the octave of Easter (the eight days from Easter Sunday through the Second Sunday of Easter) have the rank of solemnity. Funeral Masses are permitted on the weekdays, but no other ritual Masses may be celebrated during this time. The Gloria is to be sung or recited; however, the Creed is to be omitted. Preface of Easter I is also to be used, and the double alleluia is to be used in the dismissal.

**Second Sunday of Easter**  The octave of Easter concludes with the Second Sunday of Easter, which is now subtitled "Divine Mercy Sunday." The proper prayers and readings are those shown for the Second Sunday of Easter in the Sacramentary. No additional prayers or services are required that day; however, pastors may choose to have a Divine Mercy prayer service at a time later in the day. It is not appropriate to incorporate a Divine Mercy prayer service into a Mass.

**Rite of Blessing and Sprinkling of Holy Water**  It is recommended that a Blessing and Sprinkling of Holy Water replace the Penitential Rite at all Sunday
Masses during the Easter season, including Pentecost.

**Solemnity of Ascension**  The Ascension of the Lord is celebrated this year on Sunday, May 8, 2016. This is the case throughout the United States (except in a few ecclesiastical provinces) and all of Latin America.

**Pentecost Sequence**  The Sequence is sung or said on Pentecost after the second reading and before the Alleluia.

**Easter Candle**  The Easter Candle, a symbol of the presence of the risen Christ among the people of God, remains in the sanctuary or near the ambo throughout the Easter season. After Evening Prayer II on the solemnity of Pentecost, the Easter candle is placed near the baptismal font, where it should be displayed with honor.