

GROW IN YOUR FAITH

For the last two weeks, we have forgone the Saint of the Day and the Catholic Q&A to discuss the most sacred week in the Liturgical year, Holy Week.



On March 31st, we discussed Palm Sunday and Holy Thursday. On April 7th we learned about Good Friday. If you missed previous columns, bulletins are available on our website and in the MyParish app.

Holy Saturday may seem like nothing more than the day between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, but it has an importance and beauty all its own. Holy Saturday is, firstly, the day we remember Jesus 'descending into hell,' as we say in the Creed. This is not the literal hell of eternal damnation, but the hell of 'Sheol,' a place of waiting for those holy souls who died in God's favor. Those in Sheol could not see God, were not in God's presence, which is why it was referred to as hell or Sheol. Upon Jesus' rising from the dead, the gates of heaven were opened, and they ascended into eternal Glory with God the Father.

Holy Saturday was a day of mourning for Jesus' disciples, friends, and family. It was their Sabbath day. Luke tells us that the women prepared spices and ointments for the body of Jesus, and rested, as is required on the Sabbath. They planned to go to His tomb early the next morning, after the Sabbath rest was over, to anoint Him with the oils and spices that they lovingly prepared (of course, we know He was no longer there!)

Morning Mass is not celebrated on Holy Saturday, and is replaced with morning prayer. No Mass is celebrated this day, until the Easter Vigil late in the evening, when the Sun has begun to set. No communion is distributed, except in the form of Viaticum, until the culmination of the Easter Vigil liturgy.

At noon, we celebrate the blessing of the Easter foods (see insert in this weekend's bulletin), a tradition which stems from the people of Eastern Europe that has been adapted in cultures and communities all across the country.

Then late Saturday evening, sometimes as late as 11pm or 12am (but 8pm at St. Ursula Church), we celebrate the Easter Vigil, which is no ordinary Mass. It is 'the Solemnity of Solemnities.' First comes the service of light. We begin outside, around a fire, which is blessed by the priest. A new Pascal Candle is consecrated and then lit from the blessed fire. We in turn light each other's candles, and process into the darkened church, following the Pascal Candle, with only the light from the Pascal candle and our flames illuminating the darkened church. Then we move into the Great Easter Proclamation, also known as the 'Exsultet.' This is a beautiful prayer of praise, which will be chanted by Fr. Jason, in the light of the recently consecrated Paschal Candle. Dom Jerome Gassner, O.S.B. describes it as a "majestic proclamation of the Resurrection of Christ, a dramatic invitation to heaven and earth to join with the Church in joy and jubilation. It is the rite of sanctification of light and night, of place and time, of priest and faithful for the celebration of the Resurrection of our Lord." We then move into our readings from sacred Scripture which guide the congregation through salvation history, culminating in joyously proclaiming the Resurrection of the Lord. The third part of the liturgy is the Rite of Baptism, in which those who have been preparing to enter the Catholic Faith are Baptized and Confirmed into our Faith. Water is blessed, and we, the congregation as a whole, renew our Baptismal promises. It is a joy to witness these catechumen (those who have never been baptized) and candidates (those who have been baptized in a Christian church but have not received First Holy Communion or Confirmation, or only received their First Holy Communion) become members of our faith and church family.

The final part of the Holy Saturday Easter Vigil is the celebration of the Eucharist, which, according to Paschales Solemnitatis is "in the fullest sense the Easter Sacrament, that is to say, the commemoration of the Sacrifice of the Cross and the presence of the risen Christ, the completion of Christian initiation, and the foretaste of the eternal pasch."

The Easter Vigil May be slightly longer than a usual Sunday Mass, but don't let that keep you away. It is a beautiful, other-worldly liturgy - a Sacred moment when we are invited to 'touch the Divine' which is sure to lift your mind and spirit heavenward. It is sure to become your favorite Mass of the year!

Saint Ursula will celebrate the Easter Vigil at 8pm on April 20th. At this Mass, Catechumen Carmelita Staggers will receive all the Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, First Holy Communion, and Confirmation. Candidates Aimee Lee, Marie Murphy, Reginald Roney, and Brittany Shields, will receive the Sacraments of First Holy Communion and Confirmation, and Glenn Sellers will receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. Please keep them in your prayers.



Blessing of Easter Foods



Swieconka (sh-vee-en-soon-kah) – Polish Blessing of the Baskets on Holy Saturday is one of the most enduring and beloved Polish traditions. Baskets containing a sampling of Easter foods are brought to church to be blessed on Holy Saturday. The basket is traditionally lined with a white linen or lace napkin and decorated with sprigs of boxwood (bukszpan), the typical Easter evergreen. Poles take special pride in preparing a decorative and tasteful basket with crisp linens, occasionally embroidered for the occasion, and just enough boxwood and ribbon woven through the handle. Observing the beautiful foods and creations of other parishioners is one of the special joys of the event. In some older or rural communities, the priest visits the home to bless the foods.

This tradition is alive and well in communities all across the country, in families of all races and nationalities. A family does not need to be Polish to celebrate this festive occasion.

Saint Ursula Church will bless Easter foods at noon on Holy Saturday, April 20th.

We hope everyone will bring their baskets of Easter foods!

Basket Contents and Symbolism:

- Butter (Maslo): This dairy product is often shaped into a lamb (Baranek Wielkanocny), reminding us of the goodness of Christ that we should have toward all things.
- Easter Bread (Chleb): A round rye loaf topped with a cross, symbolic of Jesus, the Bread of Life.
- Horseradish (Chrzan): Symbolic of the Passion of Christ still in our minds, but sweetened with some sugar because of the Resurrection. (May be white or pink [w/grated red beets].)
- Eggs and Pisanki (Jajka): Indicate new life and Christ's Resurrection from the Tomb.
- Kielbasa / Sausage: A spicy sausage of pork products, indicative of God's favor and generosity.
- Ham (Szynka): Symbolic of great joy and abundance. In addition to the large ham cooked for the Easter Meal, often a special small ham, called the Szynka Wielkanocny is purchased specially for Swieconka basket.
- Smoked Bacon (Slonina): A symbol of the over abundance of God's mercy and generosity.
- Salt (Sol) : So necessary an element in our physical life, that Jesus used its symbolism: "You are the salt of the earth."
- Cheese (Ser): Shaped into a ball, it is the symbol of the moderation Christians should have.
- Holy Water: Holy water is used to bless the home, animals, fields and used in religious rituals throughout the year.
- A candle, often marked like the Paschal Candle lit during the Easter Vigil, is inserted into the basket to represent Christ, Light of the World.
- A colorful ribbon and sometimes sprigs of greenery are attached.
- The linen cover is drawn over the top and is ready for the trek to the blessing.

