

“This is an important book for anyone involved in the planning and execution of the Paschal Triduum. It is highly accessible, easy to read, and filled with many helpful details that are both pastoral in their perspective and liturgical in their grounding. Helmes knows the tradition, the theology, and the practice. Coupled with his wealth of experience, this book has the potential to educate and inspire both liturgical ministers and the entire assembly. Highly recommended!”

—Judith M. Kubicki, CSSF  
Associate Professor of Theology  
Fordham University

“If you are looking for an informative, practical, organized book to assist pastors, deacons, musicians, worship commissions, and art and environment committees prepare for the Sacred Triduum liturgies, *Three Great Days: Preparing the Liturgies of the Paschal Triduum* is a must-have resource. Jeremy Helmes, a musician, liturgist, and seasoned parish minister, systematically walks through the celebration of the Paschal Triduum: its history, the liturgies, personnel needs, checklists, tips for liturgical ministers, a timeline, and much more. Jeremy’s academic study and years of parish experience has enabled him to provide informed, practical recommendations and ideas, as well as useful tips which will assist any liturgy committee as they prepare for the Triduum. Also, don’t miss the several appendices, which are of great value in and of themselves. To ensure a well-prepared and well-celebrated Triduum, *Three Great Days* will surely help you in this endeavor!”

—Karen Kane  
Director of Worship  
Archdiocese of Cincinnati



# THREE GREAT DAYS

PREPARING THE LITURGIES  
OF THE PASCHAL TRIDUUM

JEREMY HELMES



LITURGICAL PRESS  
Collegeville, Minnesota

[www.litpress.org](http://www.litpress.org)

Cover design by Monica Bokinskie. Photos courtesy of W. P. Wittman Photography Limited.

Excerpts from documents of the Second Vatican Council are from *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations; The Basic Sixteen Documents*, edited by Austin Flannery, OP, © 1996. Used with permission of Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota.

Excerpts from the English translation of *The Roman Missal, Third Edition* © 2010, International Commission on English in the Liturgy Corporation (ICEL); excerpt from the English translation of *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* © 2007, ICEL. All rights reserved.

Permission to copy the appendices on pp. 73–91 is granted for use in parish ministries only. No commercial use is allowed.

© 2016 by Order of Saint Benedict, Collegeville, Minnesota. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, by print, microfilm, microfiche, mechanical recording, photocopying, translation, or by any other means, known or yet unknown, for any purpose except brief quotations in reviews, without the previous written permission of Liturgical Press, Saint John's Abbey, PO Box 7500, Collegeville, Minnesota 56321-7500. Printed in the United States of America.

1            2            3            4            5            6            7            8            9

---

### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Helmes, Jeremy A. (Jeremy Andrew), 1979– author.

Title: Three great days : preparing the liturgies of the Paschal triduum / Jeremy Helmes.

Description: Collegeville : Liturgical Press, 2016.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016018145 | ISBN 9780814646021 (pbk.)

Subjects: LCSH: Paschal triduum—Liturgy. | Catholic Church—Liturgy.

Classification: LCC BX2015.785 .H45 2016 | DDC 264/.02—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016018145>

To the faith communities with whom I have worshiped and ministered for the Paschal Triduum: St. Vivian, St. Anthony, St. John Neumann, St. Bartholomew, the University of Dayton, and St. Maximilian Kolbe. To their leaders, ministers, and members: thank you for helping me grow in love for the three great days through your intense and passionate celebration of the dying and rising Christ.



# CONTENTS

Preface ix

Acknowledgments xi

1 What's So "Great" about These Three Days? 1

2 Getting Started and Engaging the  
Parish Community 7

3 Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord's Supper 14

4 Good Friday Celebration of the Lord's Passion 25

5 The Easter Vigil in the Holy Night 38

6 Easter Sunday of the Lord's Resurrection 62

7 Liturgy of the Hours and Other Prayer during  
the Triduum 68

Conclusion 72

Appendices

A Palm Sunday: Don't Overlook It! 73

B Timeline for Preparation 76

C Setup Checklists 80

D Evaluation Form 86

E Sample Texts 89

Annotated Bibliography 92





# PREFACE

## How to Use This Book

As a means for preparing parish liturgies for the Paschal Triduum, this book is intended as a resource both for those who are undertaking this preparation process for the first time and for those veterans who want a fresh take on things, or reminders of important details. You should be able to consult it each year (perhaps on your first day back to work after Christmas break!) as a way to kick off your Triduum preparation process.

After two chapters on the “why,” “what,” and “who,” you’ll find a chapter on each of the principal liturgies, which includes an outline of the rite, some liturgical theology and history, general information, and a “walk-through” of the liturgy. Included are some “tips” for various ministry categories (e.g., music ministers, presiders, etc.). Even if those ministers don’t read this whole book, you (or the preparation team leader) can make sure all the ministers consider creative ideas by inviting them to peruse the tips in these chapters.

Chapter 7 looks at other liturgies during the Triduum, such as Liturgy of the Hours, Way of the Cross, and other devotions. Finally, the appendices include some sample texts for use when the Roman Missal suggests things are said, but provides no text.

Once you’ve assembled your preparation team and all those involved know their responsibilities, it’s time to establish a timeline and the important tasks to be accomplished. You’ll find a detailed timeline in the appendices; adapt it and make it your own.

Note that you should be thinking during *this* year’s Triduum about how to make *next* year’s liturgies even better. Make notes, ask others for feedback, keep track of ideas you have for the future. You don’t have to “solve” every problem now: just take note of something you’d like to “fix” next year, and then as you approach the immediate preparation period (winter), the team can look at solutions. Use the evaluation tool in the appendices to reflect on what was good this year and what you can do better next year.

Later on, as we look carefully at each of the principal liturgies, you’ll also want to consult the appendices, which include a detailed setup/to-do list

of preparations for each day of the Triduum. As with the timeline, adapt these checklists to make them your own, and revisit them each year, keeping them accurate.

Year after year, as you prepare for the most important liturgical season, this book will provide you with guidance to enable you and your faith community to celebrate the Paschal Triduum with joy.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project began as a collection of resources I had developed over the years of preparing parish liturgies for the Paschal Triduum. Thanks to Barry Hudock and everyone at Liturgical Press for the invitation to prepare this book as an aid to faith communities who want to prepare and celebrate well the holiest days of our liturgical year.

I am grateful to so many people whose support and assistance made this book possible. First, to my wife, Karen, for picking up some “extra slack” with our children while I clicked and clacked in the other room.

Thanks to the many colleagues, pastoral ministers, and parish worship leaders with whom I’ve had the opportunity to collaborate on the Paschal Triduum over the years: Fr. Len Wenke, Sr. Jeannie Masterson, Pat Bergen, Fr. Bill Farris, Sr. Janet Schneider, Jim Pera, Fr. Jerry Chinchar, SM, Carol Heuser, and so many others. Many of the ideas contained in this book are a result of our collaboration, with much trial and error!

Thanks to my colleagues and fellow pastoral ministers who reviewed the manuscripts and offered feedback: Karen Kane, Sarah Merkel, Mary Ella Wielgos, Deacon Mike Lippman, Tim McManus, and Fr. Steve Walter. I’m especially grateful to my friend and colleague Emily Strand, who offered her experience as an author and liturgical minister in critique of this text, her time in reading and responding, and her shared conviction that the paschal mystery is what it’s all about!

Thanks to the people of St. Maximilian Kolbe Parish in Cincinnati, Ohio, for whom I have been privileged to serve as liturgist and musician for the past six years, alongside my good friend and their pastor, Fr. Geoff Drew. Inspired by the sacrifice of their patron, the people of St. Max truly delight in the opportunity each year to celebrate the source and summit of our liturgical year.

I’m so thankful for all the assistance offered in preparing this book. Of course, the opinions and errors in the book are mine alone.

Standing meekly in the shadows of many fine scholars and authors on the Triduum—giants such as Gabe Huck, Paul Turner, Lawrence Johnson, Michael Joncas, and many others—I hope that this book will offer some assistance to anyone who now shoulders the joyous burden of preparing parish liturgies for these three great days.



# 1

---

## WHAT'S SO "GREAT" ABOUT THESE THREE DAYS?

---

"First things first!" "They broke the mold after that one!" "Let's start at the very beginning." "Begin with the end in mind." These expressions remind us that first things are very important. Laying a good foundation, starting off right: these are important for the success of any endeavor.

My wife is a pharmacist so I pay attention to news from the prescription drug industry. I'm fascinated (and a bit dismayed) by the outrageously high cost of medicine these days in our country, but I understand a bit about how it works. In reality, the costs of expensive prescription medication aren't the same for each pill: typically, each pill made costs only a fraction of a cent to manufacture, but the first one costs hundreds of millions of dollars. The most expensive part of making prescription drugs is up front: the drug companies spend all the money up front to get things right—research, development, trials, testing, retesting, evaluating, preparing for production, making sure they have everything figured out before they go on to produce millions of potentially life-saving pills. It makes more sense to spend money and time beforehand to make sure the first pill is right, because all the other pills they make afterward will benefit from the important work put into the first one. Thorough preparation for the most important pill—the first one—is key to making effective prescription medication.

I couldn't help but think about this when reflecting upon the importance of the Paschal Triduum in the context of the whole liturgical year. Since the Triduum is the most important season, the high point of the calendar, it deserves the most attention, the most time, the most energy, and the most preparation. When we prepare well for these important days, the remainder of the liturgical year will benefit from our hard work. Parishes that "get the Triduum right" reap the benefits for 362 days to follow!

Whether it means the fullest use of sacred symbols, the best processions, art, and environment that really inspires and stirs the heart, or music that truly moves us and helps us express our faith, the Paschal Triduum has the capacity to set the tone for the balance of the liturgical calendar.

The word *triduum* comes from the Latin for “three days.” Adding the word *paschal* makes it clear that these three days are about the dying and rising of Jesus Christ, what we call the “paschal mystery.” “In the Sacred Triduum, the Church solemnly celebrates the greatest mysteries of our redemption” (Roman Missal, Sacred Paschal Triduum 1).

How did this three-day festival come to be the center of the entire liturgical year? Why does it matter?

### **From Passover to Pascha: A Brief History of the Paschal Triduum**

Sunday has always been known as “the Lord’s Day”: the first day of the week, the day of the sun, the day of the church, and the day of the resurrection. The earliest followers of Jesus gathered each and every Sunday as a community to remember and celebrate their friend and teacher in the sharing of sacred stories and the breaking of the bread. To this day, the Sunday Eucharist continues as the church’s weekly celebration of the dying and rising of Christ.

The first disciples, as devout Jews, also continued to celebrate many of the feasts of their Jewish heritage. An important annual feast was that of Passover, the spring commemoration of how God saved the chosen people and delivered them from the clutches of the pharaoh. In the annual Passover celebration, the Jewish people feasted upon a roasted lamb, sacrificed in remembrance of the lamb’s blood sprinkled upon the doorposts of the Israelites. Passover celebrated both God’s “passing over” and sparing the lives of the firstborn sons of the chosen people and the Israelites “passing over” from the slavery in Egypt to freedom.

The first Christians saw in Jesus Christ the new Lamb of God, sacrificed anew for the sake of God’s people. They saw Jesus’ own death as a new Passover: Jesus “passed over” from death to new life. Jesus’ last meal with his friends was almost assuredly a Passover meal. The disciples understood that Jesus of Nazareth was the fulfillment of God’s promise to the people of Israel, and that Jesus’ own Passover was to be remembered and celebrated in the new Christian community.

Thus the feast of *Pascha* (the Greek term, derived from the Hebrew *Pesach*) was born as an annual feast for the Christian community, celebrated in conjunction with the traditional feast of Passover. In many ways it became—and remains—a “big Sunday,” the annual festival of Christ’s triumph over death. The early Christian community began to anticipate its celebration

with an all-night vigil leading up to the celebration itself. Liturgical practices varied widely in that time, but we know that it typically included a service of Scriptures, including readings and psalms, and a eucharistic celebration. Over time, the vigil began to include the baptism of new Christians.

As the church matured and grew, other liturgies developed on the days prior to the Paschal Vigil and Sunday to commemorate the final events of Jesus' life. Thursday and Friday saw liturgical services to recall and celebrate the Last Supper and the Passion. Over time three days were observed as one unit, a *triduum*. Throughout history the precise beginning and ending of the Triduum has varied, with the modern definition being from the beginning of the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday night until sundown—after Vespers—on Easter Sunday.

The way in which the liturgies of the Paschal Triduum have been celebrated has varied greatly throughout history. Elements have been added and removed. Times for the principal liturgies have moved around based on the emphases of the era. At a low point prior to the reforms of 1955, the Easter Vigil—imbued with texts and imagery of light piercing darkness—was celebrated on Holy Saturday morning, in full daylight. It had become mostly a clerical affair, with most of the faithful uninterested or perhaps even uninvited! Holy Thursday's Mass of the Lord's Supper was also sparsely attended. The Triduum was not experienced as the early Christians envisioned it, a high point of the year. It was, at best, a relief from Lent, and a prelude to Easter Sunday.

We can see this attitude toward the Paschal Triduum reflected in the 1947 liturgical document *Mediator Dei*. As scholar Patrick Regan points out in his book *Advent to Pentecost* (Liturgical Press, 2012), the focus prior to the 1955 reforms was almost exclusively on the Passion of Christ, with little attention to the Resurrection of Christ (155). *Mediator Dei* describes it thus: "In Holy Week, when the most bitter sufferings of Jesus Christ are put before us by the liturgy, the Church invites us to come to Calvary and follow in the blood-stained footsteps of the divine Redeemer, to carry the cross willingly with Him, to reproduce in our own hearts His spirit of expiation and atonement, and to die together with Him" (158).

As Regan notes, the prevailing understanding in the first half of the twentieth century was a sharp separation between Holy Week (as the end of Lent) and the beginning of Eastertide: the ancient conception of a *triduum* of days as a "hinge" between the two would not be restored until the coming reforms. Prior to the reforms enacted by Pope Pius XII and the Second Vatican Council, Christ's death and Resurrection were celebrated sequentially: one during Holy Week, one during Eastertide.

In 1955, significant reforms to the Triduum (in fact, all of Holy Week) were enacted by Rome, due in part to the liturgical movement of the twentieth century. These reforms were codified after the Second Vatican Council

in the 1970 Roman Missal, and largely constitute the modern celebration of these three great days.

The Triduum was restored to preeminence in the liturgical year, and all the liturgical documents now make clear that it celebrates not only the Passion and death of Jesus but also his Resurrection. These three days were now more precisely called the Sacred *Paschal* Triduum. The 1969 *Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and the Calendar* now makes it clear that the Sacred Paschal Triduum is a distinct season from both Lent and Eastertide, and accords the Triduum the highest rank of all liturgical time.

What is it that makes these days so great? How does the liturgical festival called Triduum unfold? How is the paschal mystery celebrated during this brief season in a way like no other?

In Marty Haugen's liturgical song "We Remember," the liturgical action of the church is described as threefold: we *remember*, we *celebrate*, we *believe*. The Paschal Triduum, as the liturgical event *par excellence*, embodies this paradigm.

### **We Remember**

All liturgy is about remembering: we remember how God has loved us throughout all times, from the very dawn of creation. In the liturgy, we participate in a kind of "holy remembering" called *anamnesis*, in which the past becomes present through our recollection. At no time during the liturgical year is this more palpable than during the Paschal Triduum, aided by the powerful symbols and sacred signs, dramatic narratives of salvation history, and rituals of our ancestors.

When we remember the history of our salvation, God's saving love is made real in our midst; in the Eucharist past and future become present at the foot of the cross. More than any other time in the liturgical year, the liturgies of the Paschal Triduum invite us to remember *who* we are and *whose* we are.

### **We Celebrate**

Of course mere remembering is never enough. Holy remembering leads to celebration, the enactment of sacred ritual. During these three great days, the church celebrates a multitude of rituals, passed down to us through the centuries, many of which are celebrated only once each year. Some have historical significance attached to the liturgical day (like the adoration of the cross on Good Friday). Others, like the washing of feet on Holy Thursday, are so closely united to the institution of the Eucharist and the ministerial priesthood, which we commemorate on Holy Thursday.

More than any other time during the entire year, the Christian community ritualizes its paschal faith during the Triduum. In procession, by firelight,



with rich and abundant symbols, in song ancient and new, with splendor and simplicity, the church celebrates the dying and rising of Jesus Christ.

### We Believe

The ancient liturgical maxim *lex orandi, lex credendi* rings most true during the Paschal Triduum. The law of prayer is the law of belief: how we pray shapes our belief. Rather than simply bringing the catechism to life through sacred drama, the liturgy brings together the children of God as the Body of Christ, and we experience Christ truly present in our midst. Our faith is not only derived from, but confirmed by, the celebration of the liturgy.

In remembering and celebrating the salvation won for us by Jesus, we are confirmed and strengthened in our faith. Far from mere novelty or spectacle, the liturgies of these three great days manifest our belief in the power of God to conquer death. When we light the new fire and the paschal candle pierces the darkness of Holy Saturday night, our faith in Jesus, the Light of the World, is renewed. When we approach the cross on Good Friday and venerate it with a kiss, our belief in God's unending love is rekindled. When we are sprinkled with blessed baptismal water at the Easter Vigil or on Easter Sunday, we show forth our deepest belief that just as water has the power to cleanse and renew, the dying and rising of Christ—in which our baptism makes us sharers—both cleanses us and renews us!

### A Twofold Obligation

The obligation for us to participate each Sunday in Mass is no secret to anyone: it's one of the hallmarks of being a Catholic Christian. There are some other non-Sunday feasts during the liturgical year on which the faithful have an obligation to participate in Mass: the Nativity of the Lord (Christmas Day), the solemnities of the Assumption and Immaculate Conception of Mary, the solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God, and the solemnity of All Saints. These vary from region to region, and diocese to diocese, throughout the world, but in every place, there are a few days each year, in addition to Sunday, on which we're expected to celebrate the Eucharist because they are so important to our life as Catholic Christians.

Why, then, are the days of the Paschal Triduum not all holy days of obligation? Other than Easter Sunday (like any other Sunday), there is no obligation for the faithful to participate in any aspects of the Triduum. Even though the church, in the *Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and the Calendar*, ranks the days of the Triduum as the "high point of the entire liturgical year," these are not days of obligation (18).

A pastor friend of mine, confronted with this truth and in need of encouraging words for his flock about participating in the Triduum, explained it

very simply. Celebrating Jesus' dying and rising for our salvation during the Paschal Triduum is not merely about obligation. Obligation is relatively easy. Participating in the Paschal Triduum is about *love*: certainly the love God showed for us hanging on the cross, but also our love for God. Love is much harder than obligation: it requires more from us, and the stakes are higher.

Consider spouses who show affection for one another. There is no obligation for a husband to kiss his wife at the start or end of the day—their vows didn't specify this! Yet it is out of love that spouses show each other affection, and all the other sacrifices and gestures that people in love do for one another.

Love is the reason why we celebrate the Paschal Triduum, and what should compel the faithful to join in the celebrations. Pastoral leaders should help people grow from understanding the role of liturgy as merely fulfilling one's obligation to an understanding of liturgy as expression of love for God. In fact, the Roman Missal itself exhorts this kind of pastoral leadership: "Pastors should, therefore, not fail to explain to the Christian faithful, as best they can, the meaning and order of the celebrations and to prepare them for active and fruitful participation" (Roman Missal, Sacred Paschal Triduum 2).

The second obligation is of the parish community to prepare well for these most important days. There are many important priorities for the parish liturgical leaders during the winter and spring: preparations for first penance, First Communion, confirmation, the weekly grind of preparing each Sunday, Lenten Way of the Cross and penance services, and more. It's hard to make time to prepare the Triduum liturgies with so many other pressing concerns. Relative to Palm and Easter Sundays—which are typically the most well attended of all fifty-two—the principal liturgies of the Triduum generally aren't the most popular. If we want to spend our time, energy, and resources on the liturgies with the most people, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil will not make the cut.

The challenge here is not just to focus on the liturgies that are popular and bring the most people, but rather to focus on the liturgies that celebrate the most important facets of our faith. Jesus was rarely interested in what was popular, and was perfectly content with a gathering of only a few: what mattered was bringing people back to God and the Gospel message of God's great love for us.

You're probably already convinced of the importance of celebrating well and preparing thoroughly the Paschal Triduum liturgies because you're reading this book! It will be important for you, then, to encourage your colleagues, your parishioners, and anyone who's not yet bought in to the notion that these three days are worth the effort. These liturgies celebrate the core mysteries of our faith. These three days set the tone for the rest of the year. Get the preparation right; invest the time and energy and your parish will benefit throughout the whole year.