

ON RENEWING THE HOLY WEEK LITURGY

*A general decree and instruction of the Sacred
Congregation of Rites by which the Holy Week
Liturgy is renewed.*



NATIONAL CATHOLIC WELFARE CONFERENCE

1312 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.

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THE SACRED CONGREGATION OF RITES

A GENERAL DECREE BY WHICH THE LITURGICAL ORDER OF HOLY WEEK IS RENEWED

FROM apostolic times Holy Mother Church has taken care each year to celebrate the principal mysteries of our Redemption, namely the passion, death and resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ, with an absolutely singular commemoration.

At first, the supreme moments of these mysteries, those of "the crucified, buried, and risen" Christ (St. Augustine, Ep. 55, 14), were recalled in a special three-day period. Soon a solemn commemoration of the institution of the most Holy Eucharist was added. Finally, on the Sunday immediately preceding the passion, a liturgical celebration of the triumphant messianic entry of Our Lord and King into the holy city was added. Thus there arose a special liturgical week which, by reason of the greatness of the mysteries celebrated, was designated as "Holy" and was enriched with exceptionally complete and sacred ceremonies.

In the beginning these rites were performed on the same days of the week and at the same hours of the day that the sacred mysteries occurred. Thus the institution of the Holy Eucharist was recalled on Thursday evening by the solemn Mass of the Lord's Supper. On Friday there was a special liturgical function in the hours after noon recalling the Lord's passion and death. Finally, on Holy Saturday night, there began a solemn vigil which ended the following morning with the joy of the resurrection.

During the middle ages they began for various pertinent reasons to set an earlier time for the performance of liturgical services on those days, so that towards the end of that period all of these liturgical services had been transferred to the morning. This did not take place without detriment

to the liturgical meaning and confusion between the Gospel narratives and the liturgical ceremonies attached to them. The solemn liturgy of the Easter vigil in particular lost its original clarity and the meaning of its words and symbols when it was torn from its proper nocturnal setting. Moreover, Holy Saturday, with too early a recollection of the Easter gladness intruding into it, lost its original character as a day of mourning for the burial of the Lord.

In more recent times another change, very serious from a pastoral point of view, took place. For many centuries Thursday, Friday and Saturday of Holy Week were holydays of obligation, so that the Christian people, freed from servile works, could be present at the ceremonies taking place on those days. During the course of the seventeenth century, however, the Roman Pontiffs themselves were compelled, because of the complete change in the condition of social life, to reduce the number of the holydays of obligation. And so Urban VIII was compelled in his Apostolic Constitution "Universa per orbem," of September 24, 1642, to declare that the last three days of Holy Week were no longer holydays of obligation and to classify them as working days.

Hence the attendance of the faithful at these ceremonies necessarily decreased, especially because the services had long been moved back to the morning hours when schools, factories, and public business of every kind are usually open and functioning on working days throughout the world. As a matter of fact, common and almost universal experience shows that these solemn and important liturgical services of the last three days of Holy Week are often conducted by the clergy in church buildings that are almost deserted.

This is certainly to be regretted, since these liturgical services of Holy Week are endowed not only with a singular dignity, but also with a special sacramental force and efficacy for nourishing Christian life.

Nor can there be proper compensation for the loss of these liturgical functions through those pious devotional exercises which are customarily called extra-liturgical and which are performed in the afternoon hours of these three days.

For these reasons during recent years experts on the liturgy, priests having the care of souls, and especially the Bishops have sent earnest petitions to the Holy See begging that the liturgical functions of the last three days of Holy

Week be restored to the hours after noon, as formerly, so that all the faithful might more easily be present at these services.

After considering the case carefully, Pope Pius XII restored the liturgy of the sacred vigil of Easter in 1951. The celebration was to be held at the discretion of the Ordinary and as an experiment.

This experiment was highly successful everywhere, as many Ordinaries reported to the Holy See. These same Ordinaries also renewed their petitions for liturgical restoration for the other two days, asking that the sacred functions be moved back to the evening hours as had been done in the case of the Easter Vigil. Moreover evening Masses, provided for in the Apostolic Constitution "Christus Dominus" of January 6, 1953, were being said everywhere and were attended by many. With all these things in mind Pope Pius XII commanded the Commission for the Restoration of the Liturgy established by him to examine the question of restoring the Ordo of Holy Week and propose a solution. After obtaining that answer, His Holiness decreed, as the seriousness of the affair demanded that the entire question be subjected to a special examination by the Cardinals of the Sacred Congregation of Rites.

The Cardinals gathered in an extraordinary session at the Vatican on July 19 of this year. They considered the affair thoroughly and voted unanimously that the restored Ordo of Holy Week be approved and prescribed, subject to the approval of the Holy Father.

After all this had been reported in detail to the Holy Father by the undersigned Cardinal Prefect, His Holiness deigned to approve what the Cardinals had decided.

Hence, by special mandate of the same Pope Pius XII, the Sacred Congregation of Rites has decreed the following:

I. The Restored Ordo for Holy Week is Prescribed

1. Those who follow the Roman rite are bound in the future to follow the Restored Ordo for Holy Week, set forth in the original Vatican edition. Those who follow other Latin rites are bound to follow only the time established in the new Ordo for the liturgical services.

2. This new Ordo must be followed from March 25, the second Sunday of Passiontide or Palm Sunday, 1956.

3. Throughout the entire Holy Week no commemoration

is admitted and, in the Mass, "orationes imperatae" (collects prescribed by an Ordinary), however they may have been ordered, are also forbidden.

II. On the Proper Hours for the Celebration of the Sacred Liturgy of Holy Week

On The Divine Office

4. On the second Sunday of Passiontide or Palm Sunday and on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of Holy Week the divine office is said at the usual hours.

5. During the last three days of Holy Week, that is on the Thursday of the Lord's Supper, the Friday of the Lord's passion and death and Holy Saturday, the following rules are to be observed if the office is said in choir or in common:

Matins and Lauds are not anticipated, but are recited in the morning at the proper time. However, in cathedral churches where the Mass of the Chrism is being said on Holy Thursday morning, the Matins and Lauds of Holy Thursday can be anticipated.

The little hours are said at the proper time.

Vespers are omitted on Thursday and Friday when the principal liturgical functions of those days take their place. On Holy Saturday, however, they are said after noon at the accustomed hours.

Compline is said after the evening liturgical functions on Thursday and Friday. On Holy Saturday it is omitted.

In private recitations of the office on these three days, all the canonical hours should be recited according to the rubrics.

On the Mass or the Principal Liturgical Function

6. On Palm Sunday the solemn Benediction and the Procession of Palms are held in the morning at the accustomed hour. Where the office is said in choir, the proper time is after Terce.

7. On Thursday of the Lord's Supper the Mass of the Chrism is celebrated after Terce. The Mass of the Lord's Supper, however, is celebrated in the evening at the most convenient time, but not before five P.M. nor after eight P.M.

8. On the Friday of the Lord's passion and death the solemn liturgical service is celebrated in the afternoon about

three o'clock. If there is some pastoral reason to do so, it is allowable to choose a later hour, but not after 6 P.M.

9. The solemn Easter vigil is to be celebrated at a fitting time, one which will permit the solemn Mass of this vigil to begin about midnight of the night between Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday. Where the conditions of the faith and of the place make it fitting in the judgment of the Ordinary to anticipate the hour for celebrating the vigil, this should not begin before twilight, or certainly not before sunset.

III. On Extending Lenten Abstinence and Fasting until the Midnight of Holy Saturday

10. The abstinence and fasting prescribed for Lent which, up until this time, according to Canon 1252, section 4, ceased after noon on Holy Saturday will in the future cease at midnight of the same Holy Saturday.

All things to the contrary notwithstanding.

November 16, 1955

Gaetano Cardinal Cicognani,
Prefect, Sacred Congregation of Rites

L. ✠ S.

✠ A. Carinci, Archbishop of Seleucia
Secretary, Sacred Congregation of Rites

INSTRUCTION ON THE CORRECT USE OF THE RESTORED ORDO OF HOLY WEEK

Since it is the intention of the restored Ordo of Holy Week that, with the venerable liturgical services of these days restored to the hours that are proper and opportune, these liturgical services can be attended more easily, more devoutly, and more fruitfully by the faithful, it is highly important that this salutary intention be realized.

Hence, it has seemed opportune to this Sacred Congregation of Rites to add to the general decree on the restoration of the Ordo of Holy Week an Instruction, by which the change to the new order may be made easier and the faithful may be led more securely to derive richer fruits from a living participation in the sacred ceremonies.

The knowledge and the observance of this Instruction are obligatory for all of those whom it concerns.

I. On the Pastoral and Ritual Preparation

1. Local Ordinaries should carefully see to it that priests, especially those who have the care of souls, should be well instructed not only about the ritual observance of the restored Ordo of Holy Week but also about its liturgical meaning and its pastoral purpose.

They should likewise take care that the faithful also during the holy season of Lent should be effectively taught properly to understand the restored Ordo of Holy Week so that they, mentally and spiritually, may take a devout part in the services.

2. The following are the main points of the Instruction that should be given the Christian people:

a) For the Second Sunday of Passiontide,
which is called Palm Sunday.

The faithful are to be urged to assist in greater numbers at the solemn procession of the palms to give public testimony of their love and gratitude to Christ the King.

Moreover, the faithful should be admonished to approach the Sacrament of Penance in time during Holy Week. This admonition must be stressed especially in those places where it has been customary for the faithful to troop to Confession on Holy Saturday evening and Easter Sunday morning. Let those who have the responsibility for souls zealously see to it that the faithful have ready access to the sacrament of Penance during the whole of Holy Week and especially on the last three days of that week.

b) The Thursday of the Lord's Supper.

The faithful should be taught about the love by which Christ the Lord "on the day before He suffered," instituted the Eucharist, a Sacrifice and Sacrament, and an everlasting memorial of His Passion to be renewed unceasingly through the hands of priests.

The faithful should be asked duly to adore the Blessed Sacrament, after the Mass of the Lord's Supper.

Where the washing of the feet, to show the Lord's commandment about fraternal charity, is performed in a Church according to the rubrics of the restored Ordo of Holy Week, the faithful should be instructed on the profound meaning of this sacred rite and should be taught that it is only proper that they should abound in works of Christian charity on this day.

c) The Friday of the Lord's Passion and Death.

The faithful should be trained to gain a right understanding of the unique liturgical services of this day. In these services, after the sacred readings and prayers, the Passion of Our Lord is sung solemnly, prayers are offered for the needs of the entire Church and of the human race and the Holy Cross, the memorial of our redemption, is most devoutly adored by the Christian family, the clergy and the people. Finally, according to the rubrics of the restored Ordo, and as was the custom for many centuries, all who wish to do so and who are properly prepared can go to Holy Communion, so that, devoutly receiving the Lord's Body which was given for all on this day, they may receive richer fruits of the redemption.

The priests must emphasize the fact that on this most holy day the faithful should keep their minds piously recollected and should not forget the laws of abstinence and fasting.

d) For Holy Saturday and the Easter Vigil.

First of all it is imperative that the faithful should be instructed about the unique liturgical character of Holy Saturday. This is the day of the most intense sorrow, the day on which the Church tarries at the Lord's tomb, meditating about His Passion and death. While the altar remains stripped, the Church abstains from the sacrifice of the Mass until, after the solemn vigil or the nocturnal wait for the Resurrection, there come the Easter joys, the abundance of which carries over to the days that follow.

The intention and the purpose of this vigil is to point out and to recall in the liturgical service how our life and grace have flowed from the Lord's death. And so, Our Lord Himself is shown under the sign of the paschal candle as "the light of the World" (John 8: 12), who has put the darkness of our sins to flight by the grace of His light. The "Exultet" is sung in which the splendor of the holy night of the Resurrection is glorified. The wonderful works done by God under the old alliance, pale imaginings of the marvels done under the new covenant, are recalled. There is the blessing of the baptismal water, in which "buried together with Christ" unto the death of sin, we rise again with the same Christ so that "we may walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). Then we promise, by the renewal of our baptismal vows, to bear witness before all by our lives and our conduct to this **grace**

which Christ has merited for us and which He confers upon us in Baptism. Finally, after we implore the intercession of the Church triumphant, the sacred vigil ends with the solemn Mass of the Resurrection.

3. The ritual preparation for the sacred ceremonies of Holy Week is no less necessary.

Hence all those things required for the devout and becoming performance of the liturgical services of Holy Week must be carefully prepared and put in order. The sacred ministers and all of the rest who take part in the services, whether clerics or laymen, especially the boys, should be thoroughly instructed about what they are to do.

II. Annotations to some rubrics of the Ordo of Holy Week

a. For the entire Holy Week

4. Where there is a sufficient number of sacred ministers the sacred services of Holy Week should be conducted with all the splendor of the sacred rites. Where there are not enough sacred ministers, the simple rite should be used. The special rubrics, as noted in the proper places, are to be observed.

5. Whenever in the restored Ordo of Holy Week, the words "as in the Roman Breviary" occur, everything is to be taken from this liturgical book. In such cases the norms set forth in the general Decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites "On bringing back the rubrics into a simpler form," issued March 23, 1955, are to be observed.

6. During the entire Holy Week, that is from the second Sunday in Passiontide or Palm Sunday up to the Mass of the Easter vigil inclusive, in the Mass (and on Friday in the solemn liturgical service), whenever the function is solemn, that is performed with sacred ministers, the celebrant is to omit whatever the deacon, the subdeacon, or the lector sing or read in the performance of their own part of the ceremony.

b. For the Second Sunday of Passiontide or Palm Sunday.

7. In the blessing and the procession, palm or olive branches or the branches of other trees may be used. These branches may, in accordance with local custom, be prepared by the faithful themselves and brought by them into the church or they may be distributed to the faithful after they are blessed.

c. For the Thursday of the Lord's Supper.

8. As is prescribed in the Roman Missal, a suitable place should be prepared in some chapel or at some altar of the church for the solemn Reposition of the Sacrament. This should as far as possible be ornamented becomingly with veils and lights.

9. A severity consonant with the liturgy of these days is clearly recommended and the decrees of the Sacred Congregation of Rites about abuses which are to be avoided or removed are to be observed.

10. Parish priests and rectors of churches should warn the faithful in time about the public adoration of the Holy Eucharist. This is to be started once the Mass of the Lord's Supper has ended and is to be continued at least until midnight, when the memory of the Lord's passion and death takes the place of the liturgical recalling of the institution of the Holy Eucharist.

d. For the Easter Vigil.

11. There is nothing to prevent the previous preparation, in colors or in some other way, of the marks to be incised with a knife on the paschal candle.

12. It is fitting that the candles held by the clergy and by the people should remain lighted while the "Exultet" is being sung and during the renewal of the baptismal vows.

13. The container for the water that is to be blessed should be decorated in a fitting manner.

14. If people who are to be baptized are present, especially if there should be many of them, it is permissible to transfer to a convenient time on the morning of the same day the ceremonies of the Roman Ritual that precede the actual administration of Baptism, namely, in the Baptism of infants up to the word "Credis" (*Rituale Romanum* tit. III, cap II, n. 12) and in the Baptism of adults up to the words "Quis vocaris?" (*Rituale Romanum*, tit. III, cap. IV, n. 38).

15. If it should happen that Holy Orders are also being conferred during this solemn vigil, the Pontiff this night should put the final admonition (with the imposition of the so-called "duty") which, according to the Pontificale Romanum should come after the pontifical benediction and before the last gospel, before the pontifical benediction.

16. On the vigil of Pentecost the lessons or prophecies, the blessing of the baptismal water and the litanies are omitted. The Mass, even when this is the conventual Mass or a solemn or sung Mass, is begun in the usual manner, after the confession has been said at the altar steps. It begins from the Introit "Cum sanctificatus fueris" as prescribed for private Masses in this same place in the Roman Missal.

III. On the Mass, Holy Communion, and the Eucharistic Fast During These Three Days

17. On the Thursday of the Lord's Supper there must be observed that very ancient tradition of the Roman Church, according to which, with the celebration of private Masses forbidden, all priests and clerics may assist at the Mass of the Lord's Supper and receive Holy Communion. (Cf. can. 862).

However, where pastoral reasons so dictate, the Ordinary may permit one or two low Masses in individual churches and public oratories. In semi-public oratories, however, there can be only one low Mass. This permission is given to give all the faithful the opportunity to assist at the sacrifice of the Mass and to receive the Lord's body on this day. These Masses are permitted only during the hours assigned for the celebration of the solemn Mass of the Lord's Supper. (Decree, n. II, 7).

18. On the Thursday of the Lord's Supper Holy Communion may be distributed to the faithful only during the evening Masses or immediately after them. Likewise on Holy Saturday it can be given only during Mass or immediately after it. The sick and those in danger of death are excepted from this rule.

19. On the Friday of the Lord's passion and death Holy Communion may be distributed only at the solemn liturgical services in the afternoon, except to the sick and to those in danger of death.

20. Priests who celebrate the Mass of the Easter Vigil at the proper hour, that is, after midnight of the night between Saturday and Sunday, can also celebrate the Mass of the feast on Easter Sunday, and, if they have the indult, they may celebrate twice or three times.

21. Ordinaries who celebrate the Mass for the consecration of the chrism in the morning of the Thursday of the

Lord's Supper can also celebrate the solemn Mass of the Lord's Supper the evening of that day. If they should wish to celebrate the solemn Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday, they may, but they are not obliged to, celebrate the solemn Mass on Easter Sunday itself.

22. With regard to the Eucharistic fast, the norms of the Apostolic Constitution "Christus Dominus," issued Jan. 6, 1955, are to be observed.

IV. On the Solution of Certain Difficulties

23. Since there are in various places and among various peoples, many popular customs connected with the observance of Holy Week, local Ordinaries and priests having the care of souls should seek prudently to harmonize customs of this kind which appear to contribute to solid piety with the restored Ordo of Holy Week. The faithful, moreover, should be taught about the supreme value of the sacred liturgy which always, and particularly today, by its very nature far surpasses other kinds of devotions and customs, however good these may be.

24. Where it has been the custom up until now to bless homes on Holy Saturday, let the local Ordinaries give proper directions so that this blessing may be given at a more convenient time, either before or after Easter. The blessing should be given by parish priests, or by other priests having care of souls delegated by the parish priests, who thus may take advantage of this occasion paternally to visit the faithful entrusted to them and to take account of their spiritual condition. (Can. 462, n. 6).

25. The ringing of the bells prescribed for the beginning of the hymn "Gloria in excelsis" at the solemn evening Mass of Holy Thursday and at the Mass of the vigil on Holy Saturday is to be done in this way:

a) In places where there is only one church, the bells should be rung when the singing of this hymn begins.

b) In places where there are many churches, regardless of whether the ceremonies take place at the same time in all of them or not, the bells of all the Churches should be rung at the same time as those of the cathedral church, or the mother church, or the principal church. Should there

be doubt as to which is the mother or the principal church,
the Ordinary should be consulted.

November 16, 1955

Gaetano Cardinal Cicognani
Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Rites

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