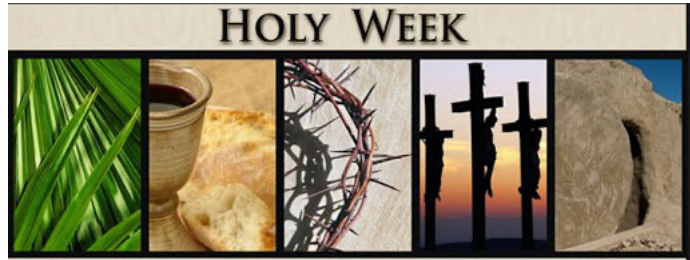


Welcome to the Book of Common Prayer

Holy Week and Easter

Last week we discussed the Church Calendar and Liturgical Year. We were reminded how Holy Week and Easter are central to the church year. The liturgies for Holy Week and Easter are some of the most solemn and meaningful of all the annual liturgies. Holy Week and Easter are two of the seven seasons of the church year.

Holy Week and Easter are important in part because this is when the Christian community remembers the last week of Jesus' life on earth: his entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the Last Supper, death on the cross, the silence of Holy Saturday, and the celebration of Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday.



From “Walk in Love”, we are told, “The liturgies of Holy Week are about remembering, not in the sense of thinking about what happened so that we don’t forget, but in the sense of re-remembering, re-embodiment, re-entering into them so that we might live through and experience them anew. Through the liturgies of Holy Week, we are given a yearly opportunity to walk with Jesus through his final days in a real and powerful way.”

Palm Sunday, through its gospel narrative and the waving of palm branches, reminds us of the original triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. [An interesting fact is that the reading of the passion gospel on Palm Sunday and Good Friday is the only time in the year when the gospel may be read by lay people.]

All Holy Week is important, but the crux of it is the three holy days—Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil. These three days are called the Triduum, which literally means three days. Celebration of the Triduum is one of the most ancient customs of the Christian church. We are connected to other denominations around the world through celebrating the Triduum.

Before the baptismal promises at the Great Vigil of Easter the Presider says: “Through the Paschal mystery, dear friends, we are buried with Christ by Baptism into his death, and raised with him to newness of life” (292). This participation in the dying and rising of Jesus is the center of Christian faith and life. It was this resurrection which the apostles proclaimed to the world, and it is our sharing in it which makes us one with Christ.

In the Triduum, Maundy Thursday celebrates the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. Following the example of Jesus, and his command “to love one another,” the liturgy also provides for the ceremony of the washing of the feet (275). The liturgy for Good Friday, which commemorates Jesus’ crucifixion, does not have a celebration of the Holy Eucharist. Like Good

Friday, Holy Saturday does not have a eucharistic liturgy; the BCP provides only a simple liturgy of the word which celebrates the burial of Christ (283).

The Great Vigil (beginning on page 285) is celebrated “between sunset on Holy Saturday and sunrise on Easter morning. This marks not only the passage from Lent to Easter but also Christ’s Passover from death to life in the resurrection, and our participation in it. The Great Vigil is the time when it is customary for new members to come into the church, and when baptisms are performed. These customs date back to the early church. The Great Vigil culminates in the celebration of the Easter Eucharist.

The Great Vigil contains many sights and symbols not found in any other liturgy. It is the liturgy that most fully explains our faith and the paschal mystery. The “paschal mystery” is an essential belief for Christians. The term refers to the salvation accomplished by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. If worshippers could attend only one liturgy during a church year, the Great Vigil is the one that should be attended.

That completes today’s exploration. I hope you enjoyed our time together. Next week we will focus on The Creeds. See you then.

In Christ, Deacon John

“Welcome to the Book of Common Prayer” by Vicki K. Black, Morehouse Publishing, 2005

“Walk in Love, Episcopal Beliefs & Practices” by Scott Gunn & Melody Wilson Shobe, Forward Movement, 2018

“Praying Shapes Believing, A Theological Commentary of the Book of Common Prayer” by Leonel L. Mitchell (updated by Ruth A. Meyers), Seabury Books, 2016