

Summary Guide to Participation in the Easter Mystery



How to Enter the Combat Stupendous: Ash Wednesday and Lent

The fundamental insight: God made man and woman in His image and according to His likeness. Original sin and personal sin kill the grace within and efface the beauty of God's image in us. Jesus' Paschal Mystery—His suffering, death, Resurrection, and Ascension—bridges the divide separating fallen earth from glorious heaven, and the Lenten and Easter liturgies are our ticket to pass over to heaven as restored, radiant, beautiful creatures.

The principal activity: Know where Lent is leading—from the dust and ashes of earth to the restored life, joy, and holiness in God. Our devotional journey to divine restoration passes over Jesus' great bridge. Explain the Paschal Mystery—what it is, why it is necessary, and what it does—to another person. Listen carefully to the liturgy's readings and prayers, and look incisively at its many unique rites for the Passover.

How to Battle for the Paschal Mystery: Palm Sunday and Holy Week

The fundamental insight: Jesus won salvation for the world and glory for God by His Paschal Mystery. The liturgies of Holy Week manifest and communicate this mystery in the world today. As Jesus was accompanied by angels and saints during His paschal work two thousand years ago, so are we accompanied today. Since Christ prayed and fasted in history's saving act, we do likewise now. Because Jesus manifested divine life and victory through particular, concrete signs and actions, we rely on His saving sacraments and sacramentals to struggle for the paschal bridge.

The principal activity: Keep your eyes fixed upon Christ by erecting seasonal images of Him at home, school, or work. Consciously invoke your personal patron saint and your guardian angel. Exercise penitential practices, such as almsgiving, fasting, reading Scripture, or praying parts of the Liturgy of the Hours, to a greater degree during Lent. Receive the sacrament of penance frequently, and attend Mass as often as possible during the week. These God-given weapons will help you to win Lent's battles.

How to Obey Orders: Holy Thursday's *Mandatum*

The fundamental insight: The liturgies and sacraments of the Paschal Triduum present Christ and His saving work to a superlative degree. The mystery of Christ present in his Mystical Body, the Church, appears in the *mandatum*, His command of brotherly love. We respond to Jesus' command by the washing of the feet, the presentation of gifts for the poor, and the bringing of the Eucharist to the homebound.

The principal activity: Be aware of your sacramental surroundings as Holy Thursday approaches—growing sunlight, increasing warmth, earth's new life—for each reveals Christ and His salvation. Know that His salvation includes our participation and that we are called to serve others in His name, not only within the liturgy of the Lord's Supper, but outside of the Mass as well. Find particular ways to answer His call to love and serve others.

How to Do This: Holy Thursday's Eucharist and Priesthood

The fundamental insight: Jesus fulfills the Lord's prescriptions to the Chosen People in the Land of Egypt. But more than looking back into history, Jesus commands the future Church to celebrate His Good Friday sacrifice under the forms of bread and wine. Through sacramental ordination, Christ bestows on His priests the power to consecrate bread and wine and make His entire Paschal Mystery present. The lay faithful share in Jesus' priesthood through baptism and are empowered to join their whole selves to Jesus' gift to the Father through the hands of the priest.

The principal activity: Along with the Eucharist, the priesthood is born on Holy Thursday, so pray at this time for priests. Consider attending Holy Week's Chrism Mass, where, apart from the blessing of the Holy Oils, priests renew their priestly promises and the faithful intercede to God for them. Meditate on the Lord's instructions to the Chosen People as heard in the First Reading for the Mass of the Lord's Supper. After the Mass, spend time adoring the Eucharist, considering Jesus' words at the Last Supper as recorded in the Gospel of John, chapters 13–17.

How to Intercede for the World: Good Friday's Cross

The fundamental insight: Good Friday stands at the center of the Paschal Triduum, extending the Cross's arms back to Holy Thursday and ahead to the Easter Vigil. The Good Friday liturgy recalls Christ's work on this day by recounting His Passion and Cross, the birth of His Bride, the Church, from His opened side, and His priestly intercession for the salvation of the whole world. These mysteries are sacramentalized in the liturgy's readings, especially the Passion from St. John, the adoration of the cross, and the expanded Universal Prayer.

The principal activity: As we hear the Passion from St. John's perspective, listen closely to the details, placing yourself among these in your mind's eye. See in the wood of the cross the material out of which Jesus, the Pontifex Maximus, builds the bridge to heaven. Focus on His opened side and reflect how His life-giving water and blood became His Bride's body, who is our supernatural mother. As Jesus died for all, pray intently during the Universal Prayer for the many categories of people, applying His channels of grace to those in your life who need His divine assistance.

How to Go to Hell—and Come Back Alive: Holy Saturday's Silence

The fundamental insight: While Jesus' body lies in the tomb on Holy Saturday, His divine person harrows hell, preaching the Good News even to the dead, and leads the righteous out of death's grasp. Until He returns, the Church and her children wait in silence, by fasting, and with prayer.

The principal activity: Meditate upon an image of Christ crucified or lying in the tomb (e.g., by Hans Holbein), or His descent into hell, or of his Sorrowful Mother. Surround yourself with silence. Prayer and fasting are especially efficacious during this day. Pray the Office of Readings or Morning Prayer with the rest of the Church.

How to Enter the Promised Land: The Easter Vigil's *Lucernarium* and Liturgy of the Word

The fundamental insight: In this Age of the Church, Jesus manifests and communicates His saving grace through sacraments and sacramental signs. The Easter Vigil's blessing of fire, preparation of the candle, and procession into the church building present to our senses Christ's Passover from death to life. The poetic *Exsultet* proclaims to our ears our happy fault that has won, by the Trinity's unfathomable plan, our salvation. The Liturgy of the Word announces to meditative minds and hearts God's preparation for Jesus' Paschal Mystery—and ours—throughout the ages.

The principal activity: Enter the celebration with eyes wide open, for its multilayered liturgical signs and symbols present the victorious Christ to our senses. Take in every detail surrounding the fire's blessing, the candle's preparation, and the procession's movement. Notice and reflect on the *Exsultet's* symbols. See yourself in the many readings: formed by the Father's hands from the earth's clay, accompanying Abraham and Isaac to Mount Moriah, and traveling with the Chosen People through the Red Sea. Then share your insights with others during Easter Sunday and the entire Easter Octave, for a spectacle such as the Vigil should make a long-lasting impression.

How to Be Re-Created: The Easter Vigil's Sacraments

The fundamental insight: The Church's sacraments are the superlative means by which fallen men and women are conformed to the living God. Baptism gives birth to new life, confirmation intensifies that same life, the Eucharist nourishes that new life. By opening the paschal bridge before us, the Easter sacraments make us divine, which was God's plan from the beginning.

The principal activity: With sacramental senses attuned to new life, pray for and participate with those about to be baptized, supporting their supernatural death and resurrection in baptism's waters, even as you recall your own baptism. Like Mary and the apostles in the Upper Room, pray for the intense outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the initiates and upon the whole Church, confirming what has already occurred at baptism. Receive Communion as if for the first time, tasting in this fruit of the tree of the Cross the fare of heaven's wedding banquet. As any child resembles his parents, know that the new children of God are called to participate in the Father's divine life even now, and that the sacraments are the God-given means to make our transformation possible. Do not receive God's grace in vain (2 Cor. 6:1)!

How to Become God: The Easter Season and Pentecost

The fundamental insight: We were made to participate in God's divine life, to radiate His image and likeness. God the Father sends His Son to make us His adopted brothers and sisters: "Since it was the will of God's only-begotten Son that men should share in his divinity, he assumed our nature in order that by becoming man he might make men gods" (St. Thomas Aquinas). Jesus works principally through the sacraments, along with Sacred Scripture, and does so with the Holy Spirit, His cooperators, who amplify and animate the divine life within us.

The principal activity: Answer the call from God and for God—to become God! Know that you were born from the heart of the Trinity and destined to abide in the midst of the Trinity. Grow your divine life by receiving the sacraments, through prayer, and by doing good works. As a family or with another group, imitate Mary and the apostles, who awaited the special outpouring of the Holy Spirit.