

Ask Fr. James

What is the theological significance the Triduum

Triduum means the three holiest days of the year - Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday/Easter vigil. Theologically, the Triduum relives how Jesus Christ saved the world. During the Triduum, we recall the events from which our salvation was wrought. It is a celebration of the origins of our Christian faith. The Triduum celebrations form an arc of observance and worship of the last days of Jesus in the Holy Week.

The aim of these three great days (Triduum) is to dramatize and proclaim the events of our Lord's passion and death and to awaken in us a sense of God's ever-presence and saving power through the cross and resurrection. By participating in these saving events through a unified sequence of actions, liturgy, symbols ritual, Scripture reading, hymnologies, worship and prayer during the Triduum, we encounter Christ who, through his redemptive suffering and death and his triumphal rising, comes to deliver all humanity from bondage and death.

On Maundy or Holy Thursday evening we celebrate the "Last Supper." The Holy Thursday celebration replaces the old the Passover which was a "day of remembrance" and a "perpetual ordinance" (Exodus 12:14), recalling God's deliverance of the Israelite's from slavery in Egypt. The New Passover includes everybody (not just the Israelite's) and commemorates the institution of the Holy Eucharist and the ministerial priesthood. Jesus gives the whole world his Body and Blood as the new way to worship and puts an end to animal sacrifice or Temple worship. On Holy Thursday, we hear from Jesus himself the crucial declaration: "This is my Body given for you" and thence he gives us the new commandment - to give ourselves to others in our community living and the way we wash each other's feet; symbolized by our gathering at the table of the Lord.

The Good Friday worship celebrates Jesus' death on the Cross. At the Good Friday service, we are invited to survey the wondrous cross (the veneration of the cross) until the entombment of Jesus. At the center of Good Friday is the Passion of the Christ. The word "passion," (suffering and death ritually witnessed in Good Friday) reminds us that "by his holy Cross, he redeemed the world. Good Friday is our "way of participating" in the Paschal Mystery when Christ, our paschal lamb is sacrificed.

And at the "Easter Vigil" we silently contemplate the transforming power of the Word of God as we listen to the Vigil readings recounting God's great deeds while eagerly watching and waiting for the Resurrection of Christ. The chants of Alleluia on this night ushers us into the joy of Easter as Christ the paschal lamb is Risen and we look to encountering the risen Christ. Holy Saturday vigil and Easter breaks open the Alleluia of joy. We sing the great Easter Alleluia! For if during Lent we have refrained from the joy of the Alleluia and now we can now sing it again with even greater joy and intensity as our desire is intensified by the deprivation of Lent. Easter invites us to look forward to a loving encounter with the risen Jesus like the apostles and Mary Magdalene. Our faith becomes deepened, as was that of Thomas and our faith en-kindled as we walk in a new way with burning hearts, as did the disciples on the Emmaus road (John. 29-21; Luke. 24).