

Holy Week Spiritual Resource Guide 2020

Home Edition



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Dear Friends,

This year during Holy Week, we find ourselves in strange times. The ancient Greeks actually had two different words for time: *chronos*, which refers to linear, clock time—the sequential ordering of events that governs our everyday lives—and *kairos*, which signified a critical, opportune, or appointed time. Whereas *chronos* measures time in seconds, *kairos* measures time in moments. *Kairos* is the qualitative evaluation of a moment. It does not ask “What time is it?” but rather, “What is this moment in time for?” In the New Testament, *kairos* is used to refer to a time of ripeness, a time for harvest, a time when the Kingdom of God is at hand.

We are living in a *kairos* time—a moment of global crisis that has confronted us like never before with the stark reality of our interdependence and interconnectedness as a human species. In this moment, we are called, paradoxically, to care for one another precisely by separating from one another, loving our neighbors as ourselves by keeping our distance from them. This unique and unprecedented situation has been facilitated, at least in part, by new technologies and methods of communication that allow us to share information and stay connected to one another even when we are physically apart. But this has also forced us to confront the reality that our digital forms of communication can never replace the kinds of connection and communion we experience when we are in the physical presence of others.

This is a time that has forced many of us to stop—to step off the conveyor belt of our regular routines in *chronos* time, and to reassess what matters most, when all the pomp of our everyday lives has been stripped away. It is also a time of unspeakable anxiety—not just about the spread of COVID-19, but about food scarcity, job loss, and economic uncertainty. Many of us are being forced to make do with what we have, and are having to find new ways to think about and respond to the needs of the present moment.

Holy Week is a *kairos* time. It is a time that invites us to step out of our own time and into the life and time of Jesus Christ, during his final week on earth. This packet has been crafted as a way of responding to the needs of the present time, by recognizing that our normal ways of honoring and celebrating this sacred time of Holy Week are not possible at this time. The rites, rituals, and traditions of our churches are more than simply reenactments of events in the life of an important historical figure. They are meant to be a means for us to enter into a lived, *embodied* experience of this *kairos* time for all of humanity, by walking *with* Jesus and experiencing with him all the harsh realizations, difficult emotions, and transforming insights along the way. We cannot do this simply by passively watching familiar liturgies play out on a screen.

This packet is therefore intended to serve as a supplement to your digital experience of Holy Week. It offers reflections on the lectionary readings, along with embodied spiritual practices for every day of the week, to help you not only meditate on the deeper meaning of the day, but hopefully to experience the presence of Jesus with you in your own home. It may be viewed as a digital file or printed on both sides of the paper (front & back) and then stapled together to create a booklet. All of the spiritual practices can be adapted for both individuals and families, and can be done wherever you are, using whatever you have. The reflections and practices all contain themes that build on one another, so that your journey may be deepened over the course of this week. May you experience the presence of Christ as you walk with him to the glory of Resurrection.

Kristen Leigh Mitchell, M.Div.

PALM SUNDAY

Gospel Reading: Matthew 21:1–11

“When Jesus and his disciples had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethpage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord needs them.’ And he will send them immediately.” This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying, “Tell the daughter of Zion, look your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!” When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking “Who is this?” The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.””

Reflection: Two Processions

Today we are accustomed to getting our palm leaves and waving them around as we process into church, in an action mirroring Jesus’ procession into Jerusalem. But of course, “Palm Sunday” isn’t really about the palms. In fact, if you notice, Matthew never even mentions palms—only “branches from the trees.” Mark’s Gospel says that they were leafy branches cut from the fields, and Luke doesn’t mention branches at all—only cloaks, which people pulled off their own backs to lay on the road at Jesus’ feet, like royalty. They treated Jesus like a king, as he came in through the East Gate of Jerusalem from the poor region of Bethany, riding on a donkey. Meanwhile, the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, would have entered Jerusalem in a lavish procession from the West Gate, coming to oversee the city during the Passover festival. Two processions: one from the east, proclaiming liberation to the oppressed, and one from the west, with pomp and circumstance hailing the might and power of Rome. The question is: which one of these processions are we in? If we are in the one we *think* we’re in—that is to say, the procession for Jesus—then that means, like that crowd back then, using what we have in order to humbly welcome and honor Jesus into our homes, as our Lord and king.



Practice: Branches & Cloaks

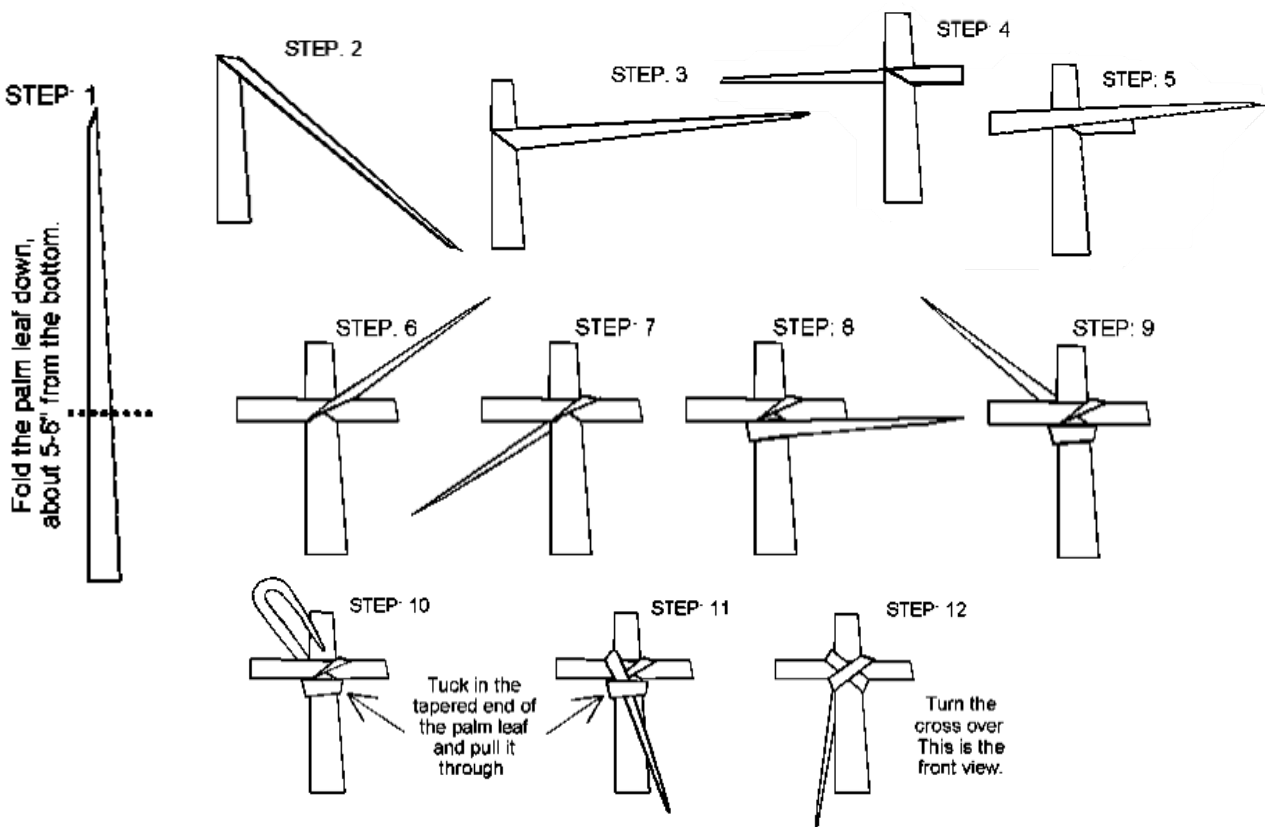
The people who traveled with Jesus and went ahead of him didn't have fancy palm leaves that had been pre-ordered from a distant supply company. Being poor, they used what they had or what they could find nearby to honor Jesus. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all emphasize that the people threw down their cloaks—literally the clothes off their own backs—while others ripped branches from the nearby trees or fields, and threw them to the ground. Today we invite you to go outside and clip some leafy branches from nearby trees or shrubs. If you don't have any trees or fields nearby, go into your closet and find some clothing that you can lay down for Jesus at the foot of your door—either at your front door or, if you have one, a door that faces to the east (your own “east gate,” so to speak). As you do, consider what it means to welcome this servant of the poor into your heart and home as your king this week.

Practice: Reading the Passion

Palm Sunday is also referred to as “Passion Sunday.” Traditionally in church, there would be a dramatic reading of the entire narrative of Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion. We invite you to take some time during your day today to read the passion narrative aloud, either by yourself or together with family members. If you have a large family, you may even consider breaking it up into different parts or roles. Be sure to take some time afterwards to think, talk, or write about the feelings and questions came up for you as you read. This year we read from Matthew 26:14–27:66.

Practice: Make a Palm Cross

Use what you have! Find large, leafy pieces of grass from the fields, or cut strips of paper about 24-26” long and about ½” wide from magazines, paper bags, or old newspapers. As you make your cross, contemplate the journey that Jesus took from the East Gate to the Cross.



HOLY MONDAY

Gospel Reading: John 12:1–11

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There, they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said: "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me." When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, since it was on account of him that many were deserting and believing in Jesus."

Reflection: Extravagant Love

Mary's act of anointing Jesus' feet with spikenard is a testament both to her love of Jesus and her prophetic wisdom; she understood that Jesus' time with them would soon end. Rather than saving the expensive perfume (worth about a year's wages) for *after* Jesus' death and burial, she decided to go ahead and lavish him with it now, not worrying about the cost. Like the widow's mite, she used what she had, and gave it all away, *not* in a selfish act of extravagance as Judas suggests, but as a selfless witness to the significance of Jesus' presence in their midst, and in her own home. Mary's action represents for us the importance of paying attention to what is most needed in the present moment, without getting bogged down in questions of cost or social appropriateness. But Judas, the treasurer, tries to trap Jesus and Mary in a double bind, re-framing the scenario in utilitarian terms: he deems Mary's behavior to be "wasteful," because something more practical or productive could have been done with the perfume. It could have been converted into money, and then given to charity. Here Judas presents a false dichotomy, which he tries to frame in "either/or" terms. But Jesus responds with a "both/and" answer, reminding him that his duty is *always* to work for the alleviation of poverty, and that acts of extravagant love that are poured out freely, like those of Mary, are never antithetical to this goal. In fact, it is often precisely those living in poverty who are most willing to spend all they have in order to celebrate and honor those that they love, or in order to help out someone in need.



Practice: Centering Prayer

We often tend to think of “prayer” as thoughts or feelings expressed to God with words, but the purest form of prayer is the surrender of our entire being to God. This is made manifest for us in the life of Jesus Christ, but it is also exemplified in disciples like Mary of Bethany, who sat at Jesus’ feet intently listening to his teachings, rather than tending to her household chores as she was expected to do. In the context of our busy, everyday lives—especially in the context of our productivity-obsessed culture—sitting in prayer (especially silent prayer!) can be very uncomfortable for us, making us feel like we are doing nothing. It can even feel “wasteful.” With everything we need to get done for our jobs, our families, our churches, and our world, simply sitting in God’s presence can seem like unproductive time, which could have been better spent taking care of the needs of others. This dichotomy between action and contemplation is a false one: letting go of what distracts us from our awareness of God’s presence allows us to open ourselves more fully to God’s guidance, which can help us to see how we can better serve one another in compassion and love. Centering prayer is a practice of silent prayer that helps us to learn this. It is not intended to *replace* our spoken prayers, but to deepen them.

Guidelines for Centering Prayer:

- Choose a sacred word as a symbol of your intention to abide in God’s presence.
- Find a comfortable place to sit, and set a timer for the duration of time that you intend to pray (20 minutes is recommended, but beginners may want to start with 10 or even 5 minutes).
- Sit in silence. During this time, you do not need to think *about* God, speak *to* God, or conjure up any images *of* God. You only need to be still, trusting and resting in the presence of God, who is always beyond our concepts, and yet is always closer to us than our next breath.
- During your prayer time, when you find yourself becoming engaged with distracting thoughts or feelings, internally “speak” your word as a gentle reminder to return your awareness to God’s presence. Do not be discouraged if you have very many thoughts. This is a normal part of the practice. As Fr. Thomas Keating, the developer of Centering Prayer, once remarked to a young nun who confessed having *ten thousand thoughts* during her first prayer session, “Wonderful! Ten thousand opportunities to return to God!”

Liturgical Form for Centering Prayer

If desired, you may use the following liturgical form as a way of framing your time of silent prayer.

Open my lips, O Lord, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your holy Spirit from me. Give me the joy of your saving help again, and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit. Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen. *Psalm 51*

O God, you will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are fixed on you; for in returning and rest we shall be saved; in quietness and trust shall be our strength. *Isaiah 26:3; 30:15*

A period of time for silent prayer.

The Lord’s Prayer

Holy God, in you we live and move and have our being. We humbly ask that you guide and govern us by your Holy Spirit, that in all the cares and occupations of this life we may not forget you, but remember that we are ever walking in your presence and sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

HOLY TUESDAY

Gospel Reading: John 12:20–36

Among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” Philip went and told Andrew, then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father save me from this hour?’ No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. The crowd answered him, “We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?” Jesus said to them, “The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.” After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them.

Reflection: God Speaks

This is the first time in the Gospel of John that we hear God speak (there is no baptism or transfiguration story in John), and it is significant that it happens here, at the threshold of everything, just before Jesus’ world is about to be turned upside down. It is important to remember that when God sends us out, it is not without direction or guidance. We are not expected to depend solely on our own strength or wisdom. Though we may struggle at times to hear, God is not silent. “Our trouble is not that God does not speak,” writes William Barclay, “but that we do not listen.” Even when we find ourselves in overwhelming circumstances, and the strain of life becomes too much for us for us to bear, we must remember always to listen for the ways in which God speaks.



Practice: Lectio Divina

One of our oldest and most treasured practices of listening, which dates back to at least the second century, is called *lectio divina*, or “divine reading”—the ancient practice of reading and listening to how God speaks to us through the Scriptures. Rather than analyzing the Biblical text from an academic, theological, or historical-critical viewpoint, *lectio divina* invites us to experience the words of Scripture as being alive with God’s presence, so that we begin to see the words of Scripture as a living and evolving text that can ground our everyday thinking in the wisdom of God.

We invite you to take some time today to practice *lectio divina* with today’s passage from John’s Gospel. Remember, this is not a “bible study” or an exercise in Biblical literacy but a personal and imaginal exercise. *Lectio divina* does not seek information about God, but communion with God. We interact with the text as though it is a living being with whom we are having a conversation.

Four Steps

***Lectio*—“Read”**

Find a comfortable place to sit and read. You might consider engaging in a brief time of centering prayer beforehand, to clear your mind and become better attuned to God’s presence. Then read the Scripture passage slowly and attentively. Traditionally, the passage is read four times, each time with a different focus. If you have four family members, you might consider having a different person read it aloud each time, or if you have two, you may want to alternate. If you are alone, you may simply read it aloud four times, or you might want to try reading in four different rooms or locations in your house.

***Meditatio*—“Meditate”**

Each time you hear to the readings, listen for words, phrases, characters, and images that seem to jump out at you. During the first reading, listen for specific *words* that strike you. During the second reading, focus on a particular *phrase* that strikes you. The third time, ask how the text resonates with you *as an individual*. The fourth time, ask what the text might be saying for *the church/world*.

***Oratio*—“Pray”**

Take some quiet time after each reading to open your heart to God. Between readings, ask God to make the deeper meaning of the text known to you, and listen for how God is speaking to you.

***Contemplatio*—“Contemplate”**

After all four readings, allow for a significant period of silence, during which you will allow the contemplation of the Holy Spirit to move in you through the text. Call to mind the words, phrases, images, and messages that struck you, and use them to begin placing *yourself* in the story. Imagine yourself interacting with Jesus or with others in the story. Where are you in this text? What questions or characters do you relate to the most? What is Jesus saying to you? How do you feel? This phase of the prayer may feel a bit dream-like as you allow God to interact with your imagination through the text, in order to arrive at deeper insights. Allow at least 5 minutes for this part of the exercise.

You may want to close your time of prayer by journaling, taking time to talk to God, or speaking with a trusted friend, family member, or spiritual director about the thoughts and feelings that arose for you during this time of prayer.

HOLY WEDNESDAY

Gospel Reading: John 13:21–32

At supper with his friends, Jesus was troubled in spirit and declared, “Very truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.” The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. One of his disciples—the one whom Jesus loved—was reclining next to him; Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So while reclining next Jesus, he asked him, “Lord, who is it?” Jesus answered him, “It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.” So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, “Do quickly what you are going to do.” Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, “Buy what you need for the festival”; or that he should give something to the poor. So, after receiving the piece of bread, Judas immediately went out. And it was night.

Reflection: Table Fellowship

One thing can be said about Jesus: he loved to eat! Consider all the times that we hear of Jesus at a banquet, dinner, or festival, breaking bread with friends and strangers. John’s disciples even mistake him for a glutton (Luke 7:34, Matthew 11:19). Jesus, of course, knew the need for human sustenance, but he also understood that in order to be in community with one another, we need to respect the sacred bond that is facilitated during mealtime. Just think of how difficult it is to sit across from someone at mealtime and not be in relationship with them. Throughout the Gospels, we see Jesus eating and drinking with friends and strangers alike. He knows that this is one of the fastest ways to break down the barriers that separate us; we must “build a longer table, not a higher fence.” The early church continued in this tradition of shared mealtime for several centuries, meeting in the intimacy of their own homes to eat, drink, worship, pray, read, converse, and celebrate Holy Communion, reminding each other of Jesus’ words: “Whenever you drink this, you do it in remembrance of me.” For the earliest Christians, any opportunity to share food and drink with one another was a sacred opportunity to welcome Jesus as their guest, exemplifying that same love and fellowship that he shared with all others—even with Judas, the one who betrayed him. Jesus’ hospitality extends to all.



Practice: The Agape Meal

In many Christian communities, a special meal called an “Agape Meal” (or “Lovefeast”) is celebrated during Holy Week, as a way of marking the last supper that Jesus shared with his disciples. This is intended to be a simple meal, which can be cobbled together using what you have. In its simplicity, the Agape Meal is a reminder of Jesus’ presence not only in the sacred meal of Holy Communion, but at any meal where we gather in his name.

Traditionally, the Agape Meal is the last meal eaten prior to the observance of the Paschal Triduum—the three sacred days of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. While it is sometimes celebrated on Thursday evening, it can also be celebrated on Wednesday evening, since Maundy Thursday technically begins on Wednesday at sundown. While the Agape Meal is traditionally celebrated with family and friends, if you are alone, you might consider making a place setting for Jesus and sharing in this meal with him, remembering that we are never truly alone.

Guidelines for preparing an Agape Meal:

- The table setting should be plain, and the foods should be sparse and simple.
- A vegetarian (meatless) meal is preferred.
- Appropriate foods might include soup, cheese, olives, dried fruit, bread, and wine.

Form for an Agape Meal

The following blessings are recited at the beginning of the meal, with all standing:

Over the Wine (or other beverage)

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, Ruler of the universe. You created the fruit of the wine, and refresh us with the cup of salvation in the Blood of your Son Jesus Christ. Glory to you, forever and ever.

Amen.

Over the Bread

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, Ruler of the universe. You bring forth bread from the earth and have given us your Son to be the bread of life. As grain scattered upon the earth is gathered into one loaf, so gather us from every place into the kingdom of your Son. To you be glory and power for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Over the Other Foods

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, Ruler of the universe. You have blessed the earth to bring forth food to satisfy our hunger. Let this food strengthen us in the fast that is before us, that following our Savior in the way of the cross, we may come to the joy of his resurrection. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, now and forever. **Amen.**

The meal is concluded with a reading of Psalm 69:1–23. Those gathered may also wish to sing a song, or offer a prayer or blessing over the gathering.

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Gospel Reading: John 13:21–32

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray them. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the others so I now say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."



Reflection: Servant Leadership

The entirety of Jesus' life, ministry, and teaching can be summed up in this iconic depiction of Jesus kneeling before his disciples to wash their feet during his last meal with them. This was more than simply the institution of a new ritual. It was a way of driving home the point that he had been trying to make all along: that true power lies not in coercion or control, in achievement and success, or in clinging to one's own life, but in *kenosis*—"self-emptying." This is key to the Christian understanding of the nature of God. Contrary to popular conception, the Christian God is not a remote, white-bearded man who sits upon a throne in the clouds, and rules with an iron fist. Rather, the God we know through Christ Jesus is an active, self-emptying Love, who was born into human poverty, and who suffered humiliation, torture, and death in order to reveal to us a different kind of power and a deeper kind of hope than anyone had yet dared to imagine. This is a God who measures success not by what we obtain, but by what we give away. Like most of us, Peter cannot fully fathom this concept of a self-emptying God. All of Peter's notions of power and success—including everything he thinks he knows about what it means to be a "king" or the "Messiah"—are based on the same top-down models of power and leadership that most of our human institutions are still organized around. Like Peter, most of us would like to avoid Good Friday, believing instead in a salvation that lets us somehow avoid the pain of surrender. Yet this is the pattern that has been written into the cosmos. This is the practice that enables a different kind of power to emerge. This is the unexpected entry point into new and abundant life: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."

Practice: Foot Washing

Those with families of two or more may still participate in the traditional practice of foot washing. Gather an empty basin or large bowl, several hand towels, and a pitcher or two of warm water. If desired, you may wish to add salts and/or aromatherapy oils to the water. Participants can begin by saying the following prayer: "O Lord, be with us now as we demonstrate our love for one another as you loved us, through the act of washing each other's feet. Amen." One person sits in the chair and places their bare feet into the basin, while the other pours warm water over them and proceeds to gently wash their feet one by one, and pat them dry. The partners then switch. The same process should be repeated for every person in the house. For those who are alone, we invite you to practice *lectio divina* on today's Scripture reading. Ask yourself: how does it feel to let Jesus wash *your* feet?

Practice: Stripping Away

Traditionally on Maundy Thursday, churches remove all ornamentation from their altar spaces as a way of symbolizing Jesus being taken away. This "stripping of the altar" also "lifts the veil" of all our religious adornments, revealing the raw, naked, and hard reality of Jesus' suffering, torture, and death. As you look around your home, think about what things you might "strip away" over the next few days. Perhaps your table linens, or some pieces of your home décor. It may also be a habit or a special food from which you choose to refrain during this time (in addition to your regular Lenten fast). You might consider placing a veil over your television or computer screen for the duration of the Triduum (until Saturday night). Whatever you do, use it as an opportunity to get down to what is most essential.

Practice: Keeping Watch

Just before he was arrested, Jesus asked his disciples in the garden at Gethsemane to keep awake with him for just one hour, but they kept falling asleep. Commit at least one hour this evening to just sitting with Jesus. You may do this through any combination of practices: light a candle, doing centering prayer, sitting with images/icons, journaling, meditating, talking with God aloud, praying a rosary, or reading the account of Jesus' arrest in Scripture. This year we read from Matthew 26:17–75.

GOOD FRIDAY

Gospel Reading: John 18:1–19:42

Traditionally, John's account of the Passion is read on Good Friday. We encourage you to read the passage either from your own Bible at home or by searching for it online (the Episcopal tradition uses the NRSV translation). You may read the passage alone, or together with other family members. You might even want to do a lectio divina on the text (see "Holy Tuesday"). Be sure to take some time afterwards to talk, think, or write about whatever feelings and questions come up for you as you read this story.

Reflection: Two Kingdoms

Pilate asked Jesus: "Are you the king of the Jews?" We can hear the mocking tone of the governor's voice coming through in the text, as if it were delivered along with a chuckle of absurdity. In this moment, two kingdoms stand face to face, at the crossroads of history: one that is personified by the military might of Pontius Pilate, and a domination system that was disguised as "Pax Romana"; the other personified by a homeless street preacher, whose company included many of the impoverished undesirables of Jewish society. Which of these kingdoms do you think will prevail? We know that the road to victory for Jesus is the road to the cross. Along the way, he will fall multiple times. He will meet the weeping faces of friends and strangers. He will be stripped of his clothing, humiliated, nailed to a cross, and then propped up for all the world to see. Here is our king. But even while we hear the soldiers laughing, we know that it is from this throne, with its crown of thorns, that Jesus does come to reign, calling the whole world unto himself. In him, we come to see that true power is not found in domination, but in liberation—not in collusion but in surrender and communion, with God and with one another.

Our lives may indeed take us down roads that are filled with danger. We may stumble, and we may fall. Friends might betray us. Loved ones may abandon us. Leaders might condemn us. And before all is said and done, we may very well find ourselves stripped of the life we thought we once knew. But even when all of us is emptied, God's presence still abides. Herein lies the victory.



Practice: Stations of the Cross

Walking the Stations of the Cross while meditating and reflecting on the final hours of Jesus' life is a practice from the medieval church that has become part of many Good Friday services all over the world. Each station marks a point on Jesus' journey to crucifixion, offering a stark confrontation with the reality of human suffering, evil, and death. While many churches have beautifully crafted markers that artfully depict each moment on Jesus' way, you can also use what you have to create a Stations of the Cross in your own home. Choose 14 locations around our outside of your house, and mark them each with simple pieces of paper or cardboard bearing the numbers 1–14. Walk between the markers in silence, and as you pause at each station, you can use the following prayers as a jumping off point for your own reflections on God's suffering and self-emptying sacrifice:

Station 1: Jesus is condemned to death.

We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you, because by your holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.

Jesus, you stood all alone before Pilate. Nobody spoke up for you. Nobody tried to defend you. You devoted your life to healing the sick, listening to the poor, and caring for those who were ignored by others. You came to show us how to love one another. Help us learn how to love you with our whole hearts. Help us to understand how we can better love our neighbors as ourselves. Give us eyes to see how we can avoid falling into patterns of scapegoating, judgment, and blame, and teach us to treat all those we meet in our lives with compassion and mercy, no matter the cost. **Amen.**

Station 2: Jesus takes up his cross.

We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you, because by your holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.

Jesus, you took up your cross knowing that you would carry it to your own death. You knew that it would not be easy, but you carried it anyway. When our problems become too heavy for us, and we become anxious and afraid to face them, give us the strength and the grace to do what we need to do. Grant us the wisdom and the humility to turn to you when we need help. In difficult times, help us to know that you recognize and stand in solidarity with our suffering. **Amen.**

Station 3: Jesus falls the first time.

We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you, because by your holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.

Jesus, when you were weak and you fell, the soldiers responded with frustration and indignation. They only wanted to get things over with, so that they could go home. At times when we see others fall, help us to respond not with impatience or frustration, but with empathy and wisdom. Help us to remember that even the stone of our greatest stumbling can be transformed into the cornerstone of new life on the other side. **Amen.**

Station 4: Jesus meets his mother.

We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you, because by your holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.

Jesus, when you looked out into the crowd, you saw the loving face of your own mother. Even though she could not take your pain away, she loved you and suffered along with you. You know the pain of having to say goodbye. Help us in the midst of our own goodbyes, especially with those whom we love and who have loved us the most, to remember that love never dies. **Amen.**

Station 5: Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus to carry his cross.

We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you, because by your holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.

Jesus, when you were too weak to carry your cross any further and no one else offered to help, the soldiers forced a passerby to carry it for you. In moments when we are asked to carry the burdens of another, help us to do so with open hearts that are filled with compassion and understanding, rather than with begrudging hearts that are motivated by a sense of obligation. Help us look at the suffering of others through your eyes, and to always be willing to ease the burdens of others. **Amen.**

Station 6: Veronica wipes the face of Jesus.

We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you, because by your holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.

Jesus, as the blood and sweat poured down your face, a woman emerged from the crowd—the first stranger to voluntarily offer you care. Placing her compassion for you over her concern for what others might think, she ran over and wiped your face with a cloth. When we are afraid of what others in the group might think of us, help us also to act without fear in saying or doing what is right. Help us to put justice and compassion over our own personal sense of group identity and belonging. **Amen.**

Station 7: Jesus falls a second time.

We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you, because by your holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.

Jesus, with each step towards Calvary, it became harder and harder to move forward, causing you to fall down a second time. In times of injury and adversity, we become even more vulnerable to subsequent hardships. Sometimes the burdens of illness, job loss, hunger, poverty, cruelty, and natural disasters can all seem to pile up, and life just does not seem fair. It becomes harder and harder for us to keep moving forward in faith, trusting in God's goodness. When we fall into despair, help us to remember that our real strength and hope lies in you. **Amen.**

Station 8: Jesus speaks with the women of Jerusalem.

We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you, because by your holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.

Jesus, even in the midst of your suffering you stopped to talk with a group of women, who were weeping over what was happening to you. You redirected their grief away from your own personal suffering, and towards the suffering of the larger society. When we are in pain, help us to look beyond our own experiences of victimhood, in order to see how our suffering relates to that of others as well as to larger patterns of systemic sin. Help us to work towards the alleviation of suffering, not just in our own lives, but in the whole world. **Amen.**

Station 9: Jesus falls a third time.

We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you, because by your holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.

Jesus, your failing strength at the end of your journey reminds us how fragile and vulnerable we humans really are. Help us to let go of our need for control, and the idea that we can save our lives by clinging to them. Release us from the compulsion to prop up our lives with more possessions, prestige, or power. Give us the grace and the faith to remember that you never abandon us, even in our failings and our falling. **Amen.**

Station 10: Jesus is stripped of his clothing.

We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you, because by your holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.

Jesus, when the soldiers tore the clothing from your wounded body, they took away the last of your earthly belongings, and you died possessing nothing. Through Adam's sin, humanity came to see poverty and nakedness as shameful, and so the soldiers mocked you as they competed over your property. Strip us of our shame and our pride, so that we might let go of our own obsessions with prosperity and prestige. Give us eyes to see what really matters, when everything else has been stripped away. **Amen.**

Station 11: Jesus is nailed to the cross.

We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you, because by your holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.

Jesus, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross, so that everyone might come within reach of your saving embrace. As we consider your wounds with the deepest sorrow and compassion, we pray that you will give us grace to accept the sufferings that we must face in our own time with strength and confidence in God's saving activity in the world. Help us to remember that this is not the end of the story. **Amen.**

Station 12: Jesus dies on the cross.

We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you, because by your holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.

Jesus, as you died on the cross, you cried out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" In your death, God tasted death, and came to know the depths of human suffering. Yet through your death you took away the sting of death, making a way for all those who seek eternal life. Help us to remember that nothing, not even death, can separate us from the love and mercy of God. **Amen.**

Station 13: The body of Jesus is laid in the arms of his mother.

We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you, because by your holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.

Jesus, as your broken body was taken down from the cross and laid in arms of your mother, she was deeply grieved. In our moments of grief, help us to remember that we are always being held in God's loving embrace. At the hour of our death and the death of loved ones, fill the sadness of our hearts with faith and hope in the life that is yet to come. **Amen.**

Station 14: The body of Jesus is laid in the tomb.

We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you, because by your holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.

Jesus, your suffering is over. Though you have triumphed, in the eyes of the world you seem to have failed. Yet sin, death, and hell have been conquered. Give us the courage and clarity of vision to have faith in your power to bring light out of darkness, and life out of death. Help us to know that even in our darkest hours, your love has conquered the grave. **Amen.**

HOLY SATURDAY

Gospel Reading: Matthew 27:57–61

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

Reflection: Jesus Goes to Hell

It is finished. Jesus' earthly ministry has come to an end. There is, however, one last rabbinical duty that he must complete. Jesus must observe the Sabbath. Here on the seventh day, just as God did in the beginning of creation, Jesus takes his Sabbath rest. And yet, as he does so, one final miracle takes place, which the Christian tradition has referred to as "the harrowing of Hell." The ancient world did not have the same dualistic concepts of Heaven and Hell that we have today. In Jesus' time, the common view was that the souls of those *all* who died went to the same place, where they were separated from the living God until the Day of Resurrection, which would only occur at the end of time. The place of the dead went by many names—Gehenna, Sheol, the Pit, Hades—but the general idea was that it was a place where the righteous and unrighteous alike, went after death, separated from God and from the living. But now Jesus has gone to Hell, and this changes everything. In so doing, Christians believe that God has been to Hell, which means that there is no longer anywhere in the universe that we can go that is beyond the reach of God. Through Jesus Christ, God has reached into the darkest pits of Sheol, and said "Come, my brothers and sisters, now you are free."

Practice: Sabbath

Sabbath is time that is made holy by being set apart for rest. Sabbath is a way of remembering that we are not God, that everything is not up to us, and that no matter what we may acquire or achieve in this lifetime, we are still mortal, and yet still beloved. Through the practice of Sabbath, we learn that we do not have to produce or earn our way to our value as human beings. Our value is intrinsic, like that of the whole of creation. But in our culture, we seldom take time to truly observe this practice of Sabbath. We may take days "off" from work or school, but even those days are usually spent doing other kinds of work that we never seem to have time for during the week. Our culture has frequently warned us that idle time is wasteful—a squandering of the time that God has given us. But this attitude runs counter to the Third Commandment, as well as God's own behavior in the story of creation and on the day after Jesus' death. On the Sabbath, God and Jesus rest. So we can too.

Take some time today to rest. Ponder the unspeakable gift of doing nothing. Free yourself from the worries of your earthly labors, and allow yourself to just be. We are, after all, human *be*-ings, not human *do*-ings. Think about what this Holy Week at home has meant to you, and what lessons you have learned along the way. Refrain from your Easter celebrations just a little longer, as you try to take in this holy moment of rest.

EASTER SUNDAY

Gospel Reading: Matthew 28:1–10

After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him, the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ This is my message for you.” So they left the tomb quickly, with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly, Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

Reflection: Seeing the Resurrected Jesus

There must have been so much sadness on the hearts of Mary Magdalene and Mary of Bethany when they went to the tomb that morning; yet God took that pain and transformed it into the unspeakable joy of seeing Jesus beyond the grave! Through this revelation, we now know that nothing, not even death itself, is beyond the redemptive power of God. Throughout this week, we have traveled with Jesus while having to endure the difficult reality of our social quarantine, and we have pondered anew what it means to invite Jesus into our lives. Like the earliest followers of Jesus, we used what we had to honor God’s presence in our homes, and have hopefully we developed better “ears to hear” God speaking, and “eyes to see” God showing up in places we might not expect. Whether or not we are able to gather together in our churches to celebrate, we know that Resurrection is real, no matter what! Jesus walks away from the tomb, and goes out to meet people where they are: he meets them while they are walking along the road, while they are eating their breakfast on the beach, and while they are gathered afraid in the upper rooms of their home. This same Resurrected Jesus will meet us too; we only need the eyes to see him. While we cannot “go to Galilee” to share in this Good News with others, we can take time this Easter to give thanks for all the ways that God still shows up in the midst of our everyday lives, breaking through our fear and isolation, and giving us the hope and courage we need to face whatever may come. Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia.

Practice: Ring Them Bells

Easter is here! With it comes the joy of Jesus’ resurrection and the promise that God will bring life out of death! How shall we celebrate? In many churches, people ring bells, either at the Great Vigil of Easter on Saturday night, or at sunrise on Sunday morning. We invite you to go out into your driveway or into the streets, either on Saturday night after sundown or Sunday at dawn, and ring out your own bells. Use car keys if you don’t have any! Shout “Alleluia! Christ is risen!” at the top of your lungs! Then break your fast by bringing back all those objects that you stripped away on Thursday night. Prepare a feast using whatever you have! While we often think of “feasting” on food, you can also feast on music, dancing, or just sharing in conversations with those you love. Whatever your “feast” looks like this year, we encourage you, above all, to feast on gratitude in your hearts for the redemptive power and the awesome promise of our loving, liberating, and life-giving God.