

Liturgical Notes for Lent & Holy Week

By The Rev. Matthew Hoxsie Mead

This is offered as a liturgical primer for what to expect during Lent, Holy Week, and Easter at Christ Church. I have bolded certain words to make it easier to follow.

The first day of Lent is Ash Wednesday. The Ash Wednesday liturgy features Readings from Scripture, the Litany of Penance, the Blessing and Ministration of Ashes, and the Holy Eucharist. Ironically, the Ashes are optional and simply an outward sign of what goes on at the service. That said, they are a traditional sign of penance, and also a sign that though we are mortal, we partake in Christ's resurrection.

Lent isn't technically 40 days. To get to 40 you have to exclude Sundays. The number 40 mirrors the 40 days that Jesus spent in the wilderness, which in turn mirrors the 40 years the Israelites spent in the wilderness. The Church settled on 40 days of fasting and prayer, and excluded Sundays since they were and are Feasts of Our Lord and not fasts. The BCP 1979 notes that there are two major Fasts (with a capital F no less) in the year: Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. The rest of Lent is listed simply as "observed by special acts of discipline and self denial" – or in shorthand, fasts (with a little f).

Purple or "Lenten Array" vestments are worn during Lent. We actually have sets of each type of vestments at Christ Church. Lenten Array sets feature off-white, almost oatmeal colored, vestments. In order to use as many of our sets as possible, we will wear purple in Lent, and we will use the Lenten Array set on Maundy Thursday (the traditional liturgical color for Maundy Thursday is white). The Lenten Array set was designed to match the Passion Red set that we use on Palm Sunday and Good Friday.

There are a few liturgical changes in Lent. It is traditional in Anglican/Episcopal churches to begin the first Sunday in Lent with the Great Litany, and when the Great Litany is used the Prayers of the People are omitted or drastically shortened and the Confession is omitted because the Litany contains much more penitential language. The Prayer Book offers a "Penitential Rite" that may be used in Lent, which begins the service with the Confession of Sin and includes the Ten Commandments. Throughout Lent *Gloria in excelsis* is replaced with *Kyrie eleison* ("Lord have mercy upon us"), Alleluia is not said or sung,¹ and the Blessing at the end of the service may be replaced with a Solemn Prayer over the People.²

Beginning on Ash Wednesday and continuing through Palm Sunday we will use **Eucharistic Prayer A** at all services that include music. Prayer A is the shortest Eucharistic prayer in our Prayer Book, and its length will offset some longer liturgical items that appear in Lent. On Ash Wednesday the ashing which is accompanied by the singing of the *Miserere* (Psalm 51) is one of the most powerful and beautiful moments of the church year, but it takes time.

¹ The expanded use of Alleluia is traditionally linked to Easter and services specifically about the resurrection (like a funeral). Alleluia is also traditionally suppressed throughout Lent (except if there is a funeral in Lent). The use of Alleluia at the fraction may be said (or sung) any time except Lent.

² The Seasonal Blessings and Solemn Prayers over the People are provided in the *Book of Occasional Services*.

Likewise, on the First Sunday of Lent the choral version of the Great Litany is glorious, but it too takes time. Additionally, the Second, Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays in Lent this year all feature very long readings of Scripture. By shifting to a shorter Eucharistic Prayer for this season, we can maintain our normal service length without cutting anything essential or that is part of our tradition.

When we move out of Lent and into Easter, starting with Maundy Thursday and continuing through Pentecost, we will use **Eucharistic Prayer D** which is the oldest Eucharistic prayer in our Prayer Book. Prayer D is traditionally thought to have been authored by Saint Basil (*d.* 379) or Saint Cyril of Jerusalem (*d.* 386), and it is known as the ecumenical prayer because it is common to nearly all mainline Protestant churches, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Orthodox Churches. By using it for the ancient rites of the Triduum and throughout the Easter season we highlight the common faith all Christians share in Jesus Christ.

There are two obvious patterns that overlap in Holy Week. The first and older pattern is rooted in Sunday worship – let’s call it the ***Sunday Pattern***. Beginning in apostolic times Christians gathered each Sunday for “the prayers and the breaking of bread” and to recall and proclaim the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Each year at Passover, the first Christians recalled the anniversary of that first Easter. Once the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection had been written down and spread throughout the church, that observance almost certainly included a reading of what we would call the Passion and Resurrection Narratives. Before too long that larger narrative had been broken in two and a Sunday devoted specifically to the Passion was followed by a Sunday of the Resurrection. The second pattern follows a more detailed timeline and likely began in Jerusalem when Christians visited the locations (i.e. the road into Jerusalem, the Upper Room, the Mount of Olives, the Pavement, Golgotha, the Empty Tomb) where they believed certain events in the last week of Jesus’ life had occurred. It is well documented that there is disagreement over some of these locations, but the practice of visiting the locations on specific days was something that pilgrims in Jerusalem ultimately copied in their home churches. Eventually a second, more detailed pattern developed – let’s call that pattern the ***Pilgrimage Pattern*** – which was grafted onto the older *Sunday Pattern*. That should explain why the Passion is read on Palm Sunday and again on Good Friday and also why the Resurrection is read on Easter Eve (while it was still dark as the Gospels attest), and again on Easter Morning.

Throughout Holy Week, the congregation plays two roles. Our primary identity is the **Body of Christ**. The liturgy makes it clear that we enter the church on Palm Sunday hailed as Children of God and Heirs to the Kingdom of Heaven. The liturgy makes it clear on Maundy Thursday that we are called by Jesus not just to be served, but to serve as Jesus himself served. The liturgy makes it clear on Good Friday when we read the Passion that our voices are not only those of the crowd but also of Jesus and we speak as his Body in the world today. The liturgy makes it clear on Easter Eve that each of us is a Light to the world and that through the waters of Baptism we die to sin and rise to new life in Christ.

Our other identity is that of **Jesus’ disciples** who are in the midst of a lifelong journey of faith. The liturgy makes it clear that we are the disciples on Palm Sunday proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah but perhaps unsure what that really means. The liturgy makes it clear that we are

willing to be served by Jesus, but we are not always prepared to serve others. The liturgy makes it clear on Good Friday that we are occasionally part of the crowd who convict Jesus or simply remain on the sidelines. And of course the liturgy makes it clear on Easter that we are witnesses to the resurrection encouraged to follow the example of the apostles who proclaimed to the world what they had witnessed.

The rites of Holy Week balance these two identities very well. Sometimes the entire congregation takes on a certain role. Other times members of the congregation take part in aspects of the service, and they do it – not as actors in a play – but as representative members of the entire Body. It is possible to offer these rites so that that balance is thrown out of whack: so that the congregation hardly identifies with Jesus at all, or so the congregation isn't reminded that even the most obvious saint still strives and struggles to follow Christ. When that balance is struck, Holy Week is awesomely inspiring and, in my experience, this is when it clicks that Holy Week truly is the heart of our year.

Holy Week begins with the Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday. The service begins with a liturgical reenactment of the entrance into Jerusalem that is rooted in the *Pilgrimage Pattern*. Palms are blessed and distributed and the congregation enters the church to begin Holy Week. The readings, prayers and music, are festive, even if they are tinged with a somber note because we know where our next steps will lead us. The service then abruptly shifts to the *Sunday Pattern*. The readings, music, and prayers are no longer about Palms but the Passion.

Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday in Holy Week offer a period of deeper reflection on the Passion. On Tuesday the clergy of the entire diocese gather for the annual Chrism & Collegiality Mass at the Cathedral. At this service the bishops, priests, and deacons renew their ordination vows, the Bishop of New York blesses Chrism Oil that is used at Baptisms and often for healing throughout the diocese for the coming year, and the Bishop of New York consecrates Eucharistic bread called *fermentum* that is distributed to every church and placed into the chalice at the Maundy Thursday service and an outward sign that the entire diocese shares Communion with each other and the Bishop.

The *Pilgrimage Pattern* returns for the ***Easter Triduum*** which is celebrated on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. The days of the *Triduum* may be thought of as distinct from one another, but the liturgy links them together (there is only one opening acclamation and one dismissal across the three days), and I encourage you to come to all three.

The *Easter Triduum* begins on **Maundy Thursday**. Our schedule starts with a Mediterranean-themed potluck supper at 6:30 p.m. which is followed by the Maundy Thursday liturgy at 7:30 p.m. Maundy Thursday is traditionally a festive day when flowers (often calla lilies) are placed at the altar, bells are rung, the *Gloria in excelsis* is sung, and white vestments are worn. Elements of the service reenact the Last Supper. Saint John's account of the Foot Washing at the Last Supper is read, and then an opportunity is given for members of the congregation personally to take part in the symbolic ministry that Jesus performed for his disciples. This is an excellent opportunity for the congregation to play the role of disciples whose feet are washed, and then to kneel down as Jesus did and humbly wash the feet of another. The Eucharist on Maundy Thursday is powerful, and it ends dramatically. After the

post-communion prayer the Sacrament is transferred to the Altar of Repose. Then as Psalm 22 is read the altar is stripped bare, washed with water and wine, and the other decorations in the church are removed or veiled. The service ends in silence, and all are invited to keep watch for a period of time before the Reserved Sacrament until midnight.

This year, a group of us are planning to make a pilgrimage to several other, local churches beginning around 9:00 p.m. to visit and pray at other Altars of Repose. Our pilgrimage will conclude at our own Altar of Repose near midnight for a time of silence and prayer. If you are interested in joining us, please contact me or Michael Moynihan – or simply join us on Maundy Thursday.

The *Easter Triduum* and *Pilgrimage Pattern* continue on **Good Friday**. The time of the service at 12:00 Noon is attached to the Gospel narratives that attest that Jesus was crucified at midday. The sanctuary and altar remain bare from the evening before and the service begins in silence. The clergy enter, prostrate themselves before the altar, and all kneel for a time. After the opening prayer, the readings prophesying and explaining the Passion are read, followed by a dramatic version of Saint John's Passion sung to the traditional setting by the choir. The form of the Prayers of the People on Good Friday, known as the Solemn Collects, is used only on Good Friday. After the Solemn Collects a large wooden cross is brought into the church and displayed for a time of prayer, reflection, and veneration. The Eucharist is not celebrated on Good Friday though the service does include the ministration of Holy Communion that was blessed and reserved the evening before. Once again the service concludes in silence without a dismissal.

The **Great Vigil of Easter** concludes the *Easter Triduum* and *Pilgrimage Pattern*. The service begins outside in the Garden of Resurrection at 7:30 p.m. with the lighting of the Easter Fire and Paschal Candle. The congregation then follows the Paschal Candle indoors where the traditional Easter proclamation, the *Exsultet*, is sung. The service continues with a series of prophesies read in the darkness. It is at this point that the Easter Vigil can spiral out of control with too many readings and psalms. For that reason we will limit the prophesies a bit. The service continues until the Great Alleluia and Resurrection Gospel. After the sermon Baptism is celebrated or the Renewal of Baptismal Vows is offered. The service concludes with the celebration of the Holy Eucharist and the final dismissal – the first dismissal in three days.

On **Easter Sunday** the *Sunday Pattern* resumes. Our custom has been to offer services at 9:00 AM and 11:15 AM. These services will be nearly identical and a festive coffee hour and Easter Egg Hunt will be offered, as is our custom, between the services.

Easter begins what is known as **Eastertide**, a fifty day season celebrating the Resurrection. Saint Luke recounts that Jesus ascended to the Father forty days after Easter. **Bishop Shin** will be with us at 10:00 a.m. for Confirmation on Sunday, May 14. We will celebrate **Ascension Day**, Thursday, May 25, 2017, with a Steak & Wine dinner at 6:00 PM, followed by a 7:30 PM Sung Eucharist with the Rev. Theodora Brooks, as our guest preacher. Eastertide concludes with the **Day of Pentecost**. Pentecost was a Jewish festival fifty days after Passover, and it has been adopted by Christians and modified into a celebration of the gift of the Holy Spirit, as recounted by Saint Luke in the Acts of the Apostles. Pentecost is June 4.