

A Catholic's Guide to Holy Week

Holy Week is the most important week in Catholicism. This week of great reverence and reflection spans the final eight days of Jesus' life—from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday. It is astounding how much wisdom, insight and inspiration are available to us during this one week. Here is just a sample of what happens during Holy Week:

- Palm Sunday, Jesus triumphantly enters Jerusalem
- Monday of Holy Week, Jesus clears out the temple with a whip
- Tuesday of Holy Week, Jesus is anointed with oil at Bethany and preaches on the Mount of Olives
- Spy Wednesday, Jesus is betrayed by Judas
- Holy Thursday, Jesus celebrates the Last Supper, prays in the Garden of Gethsemane, and is arrested
- Good Friday, Jesus is sentenced to death, scourged, beaten, crucified, and dies on the Cross
- Holy Saturday, Jesus is buried in the tomb and descends into hell
- Easter Sunday, Jesus rises from the dead

We are all trying to make sense of life. One way for us to understand our lives is to look at them through the great experiences that happen during Holy Week. Just try this exercise—at the end of every day, ask yourself, "What sort of day did I have today? Did I have an Ash Wednesday day, or did I have an Easter Sunday day? Did I have a Good Friday day, or did I have a Holy Saturday day?"

What defines those sorts of days? Good Friday is an easy one—it's a day of suffering and sacrifice. There are some days you get to the end of, and you feel like that's the kind of day you've had. What's Holy Saturday? It's a day of darkness, doubt, anxiety, confusion, and a day where faith is tested. What's Easter Sunday? It's a day of new life. Maybe there's a birth of a child in the family, and we see it as a miracle, a gift from God.

We're trying to make sense of our lives, and God is constantly trying to help us make sense of them. These great moments in the life of the Church and the life of Jesus provide powerful lenses through which we can see our lives in a new way, expanding our understanding of ourselves and others.

Keep reading for more information about each day of Holy Week and simple, yet powerful ways to engage with each moment along the way.

When is Holy Week 2026?

This year, Holy Week begins on Palm Sunday: March 29, 2026. It ends on Easter Sunday: April 5, 2026.

What is Palm Sunday?

Every day of Holy Week is one step on a spiritual pilgrimage, and Palm Sunday is the day that pilgrimage begins.

Palm Sunday takes place one week before Easter and commemorates Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Catholics carry blessed palm branches into church, symbolizing the

crowd's welcoming gesture as Jesus rode into the city on a donkey. The Gospel readings recount the story of Jesus' death and Passion, inviting us to reflect on his sacrificial love and the profound significance of Holy Week. You can reflect on this passage by reading the Gospel of Mark Chapter 11, verses 1-11.

How to Observe Palm Sunday

Celebrating Palm Sunday begins with a uniquely powerful experience of Mass. This particular Mass includes two incredible readings from the Gospels. As Mass begins, we hear the account of Jesus triumphantly entering Jerusalem on a donkey and being praised by massive crowds. It is a special opportunity to begin a spiritual pilgrimage toward Easter.

Then, during the Liturgy of the Word, we dive into the entire Passion account. Many parishes present this account in an interactive format: the priest reads Jesus' lines, lectors narrate and read the parts of many characters, and everyone in the pews reads the part of the crowd. As you listen, place yourself there in the story. Imagine the sights and sounds. Who do you resonate with? What words or phrases stick out to you? It is a particularly long reading, so try to focus on the one thing God is trying to say to you.

At Palm Sunday Mass, you'll also receive blessed palm branches. Many people keep these palm branches all year, using them as a religious decoration in their home or weaving them into a cross shape. Since palm branches are a blessed item, they should not be thrown in the trash. If you do not want to keep your branch, you can return it to the church where it will be burned for ashes the following Ash Wednesday!

What is the Chrism Mass?

The word Christ means Anointed One. Many of the most significant moments in the life of a Catholic are marked by a special anointing. For instance, the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Orders and Anointing of the Sick all use sacred oil to symbolize our union with Jesus and the outpouring of his grace.

All of that oil is set apart, blessed and distributed at the Chrism Mass.

Many dioceses celebrate the Chrism Mass on Tuesday, Wednesday, or the morning of Holy Thursday. During the Chrism Mass, the Oil of the Sick (used during the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick), the Oil of Catechumens (used during the Sacrament of Baptism), and the Chrism oil are consecrated by the Bishop. Large vessels of oils are carried to the altar for the blessings and consecration of Chrism, which is a mixture of oil and balsam. After Mass the oils are distributed to representatives of each parish. The oils are taken back to the parishes and used for the Sacraments throughout the year.

But that's not all. Another important moment of the Chrism Mass is that every priest within the diocese renews his priestly promise. We're also invited to pray for all priests and their ministry.

What happened on Monday of Holy Week?

As you continue your pilgrimage through Holy Week, Monday is an opportunity to slow down and reflect on the humanity of Jesus.

On this day, Jesus entered the temple, made a whip out of chords, flipped the tables of money changers, and drove them out of the sacred space. Many people relate to this moment in Jesus' life because it reveals that he too felt the very human emotion of anger.

Anger is a natural and normal part of our human makeup. There are times when anger should be expressed and expressed powerfully. But they are rare. Like any passion, for anger to be useful it has to be harnessed, controlled, and directed at will.

Monday of Holy Week is a great time to consider a few key questions: What anger and resentment are you carrying around in your daily life? How do you process your anger—in a healthy or unhealthy way? What would your life look like if you could channel your anger into productive and decisive action?

One great way to observe the Monday of Holy Week is to go to Confession. Allow God's forgiveness to wash over you so that you can let go of any anger or resentment that is lingering in your heart.

You can reflect further on Monday of Holy Week by reading John 2:13-22 or by watching a Holy Monday Reflection.

A Prayer for Monday of Holy Week

Jesus, Thank you for the vast array of feelings and emotions that you allow me to experience. Teach me to release any resentment that is lingering in my heart and help me to express my anger in a healthy way. When I notice injustice, give me the courage and boldness to do something about it. Amen.

What happened on Tuesday of Holy Week?

Tuesday was a busy day for Jesus and the disciples. So much happened on this day, including Jesus calling out the Pharisees, teaching by the fig tree, and preaching extensively on the Mount of Olives.

But perhaps the most powerful moment occurred that night. After a long day, Jesus and the disciples went to Bethany to stay the night. There, a woman named Mary anointed Jesus with oil. The disciples are frustrated that such an expensive oil was used when the money it was worth could have been given to the poor. But Jesus responds with incredible gratitude and expresses his appreciation for Mary's tender love and care.

Tuesday of Holy Week is a great time to consider: Who and what am I most grateful for in my life? How often do I express my appreciation for those people and experiences? What would happen in my life if I lived every day from the perspective of gratitude?

One great way to observe Tuesday of Holy Week is to deep clean your home. This tradition arises from the Jewish custom of preparing the home for Passover. Often, decluttering our homes is an avenue to decluttering our souls.

You can reflect further on Tuesday of Holy Week by reading Matthew 21:23-27, Matthew 22: 34-40, or Matthew 26:6-13 or by watching a Holy Tuesday Reflection.

A Prayer for Tuesday of Holy Week

Lord, Thank you for all the ways you bless me, those I am aware of and all those I am still oblivious to. The Scriptures show me that from the beginning you have desired friendship with humanity. Help me to know and believe that just as you yearned for friendship with Adam and Eve; Abraham, Moses and Noah; Ruth, Esther, Rachel and Mary; you desire a powerful friendship with me. Give me a spirit full of gratitude and a passion for prayer so together we can foster a beautiful friendship. Amen.

What happened on Wednesday of Holy Week?

Wednesday of Holy Week is often called Spy Wednesday. Why? Because this is the day Judas Iscariot spies on Jesus, secretly plotting to have him arrested.

On this day, Judas goes to the chief priests and asks them how much money they'd be willing to give him if he turned Jesus in. Thirty pieces of silver is enough for him to turn on Jesus, all of the disciples, and the future he had with a life of faith.

Wednesday of Holy Week is a powerful opportunity to reflect on the following: Where in my life have I experienced betrayal or a violation of trust? Am I holding onto that pain or have I invited Jesus into it? Where have I betrayed myself or lost the trust of others? How can I seek forgiveness and make amends?

One common way to observe Spy Wednesday is to eat simple meals, offering the sacrifice as a prayer to Jesus. You can reflect further on Spy Wednesday by reading Matthew 26:14-16 or by watching a Holy Wednesday Reflection.

A Prayer for Wednesday of Holy Week

Jesus, help me to love like you. There are so many obstacles that get in the way of loving like you: my selfishness and insecurities; my pride and unwillingness to forgive; my anger and envy; my greed and laziness. Fill me with the grace to pray more than ever before in my life, and cast these obstacles aside so that each day I can love more and more like you. I pray in a special way today for anyone who has been unjustly accused and punished for something they didn't do. Raise them above these painful circumstances and somehow keep their hearts from hardening with anger and resentment. Amen.

What is Holy Thursday?

What did Jesus do on his final night on earth? The Gospels are aligned. Jesus gathered together his closest friends for the Last Supper.

Holy Thursday is the first day of the Easter Triduum, the most sacred days of the Catholic faith. It begins with the Mass of the Lord's Supper, commemorating the Last Supper celebrated by Jesus and his disciples on the Jewish holiday of Passover. It's not a Holy Day of Obligation, but many Catholics attend Mass. During this Mass, the priest washes the feet of some members of the parish in memory of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples.

But perhaps the most significant thing that happened on Holy Thursday was that Jesus instituted the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

In the words of Saint Luke, "And when the hour came, he sat at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, 'I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.' And he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' And likewise the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.'" (Luke 22:14-16; 19-20)

Jesus was clear. "This is my Body. Eat it." And "This is my Blood. Drink it." "Do this in remembrance of me." It's not a symbol or a metaphor. It's a clear and direct command. Jesus impresses upon his disciples that this is a sacred meal of his Body and Blood and that they should continue this practice after he is gone.

For over two thousand years, Catholics have taken Jesus at his word and obeyed the command he gave on his final night through the sacred ritual of the Mass.

You can reflect further on Holy Thursday by reading Luke 22:14-16; 19-20 and Luke 22:39-46 or by watching a Holy Thursday Reflection.

How to Observe Holy Thursday

Since it's the anniversary of the Last Supper, Holy Thursday is the perfect time to attend Mass. Some Catholics follow a beautiful tradition after Mass where they visit Jesus in the Eucharist at seven different churches in their area. Another way to celebrate Holy Thursday is to attend Adoration and spend time meditating on the gift of the Eucharist. Jesus has given himself completely to you. Will you give yourself to him?

A Prayer for Holy Thursday

Jesus, Draw us nearer to you than ever before. Inspire us to spend time with you in the tabernacle. Fill us today with a whole new love and respect for the power of the Eucharist. Lord, take our miniscule understanding of what the Eucharist is and what it can do to a whole new level. Jesus, help us realize what we are really hungry for in our lives today and give us the wisdom to realize that you want to feed our deepest needs with the Eucharist. Help us to remain close to you as we prepare for Easter. And bless us in ways unimaginable. Amen.

Why is it called Good Friday?

Good Friday is the day Jesus was tortured, mocked, crucified, and died. It was a day of incredible suffering and hatred—so why do we call it Good Friday?

We call it Good Friday because the suffering and sacrifice of Jesus saved us from our sins. And even though it was an incredibly tragic day, it was one of the greatest days in history.

As it says in Isaiah, "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed."

There is no path to happiness in this life unless you can make sense of suffering, and Christianity is the only religion or philosophy that understands the transformative value of suffering. While the whole world is doing everything it can to avoid and drown out

their pain and suffering, we are reminded each Sunday at Mass that our pain and suffering have tremendous value when united to the pain and suffering of Jesus on the Cross.

Separated from Jesus, our pain and suffering become meaningless, and that is why life is so depressing for so many in a world that has rejected God and the idea that suffering has value. Willing sacrifice out of love is a path most people have never tried. And it is a path that is essential if we are going to find our way back to thriving in this world.

You can reflect more on Good Friday by reading Luke 23:26-47 or by watching a Good Friday Reflection.

How to Observe Good Friday

One powerful way to remember Good Friday is by maintaining silence throughout the day, especially between 12 pm and 3 pm (when Jesus was on the Cross). Although there is no Mass, many people still visit their church to attend a Stations of the Cross service. You could also spend time meditating on the Passion of Jesus by reading the Passion accounts in the Gospel or watching a movie adaptation like *The Passion of the Christ*.

A Prayer for Good Friday

What was Jesus hoping to achieve by dying on a cross? What gave him courage and perseverance to go through with it? There are many answers, but consider this: he hoped his life and death would change what people placed at the center of their lives. What's at the center of your life? Money, sex, food, drugs, shopping, image, ego, social media, your phone—or the love of God?

This Good Friday, let the death of Jesus rearrange your priorities like never before. Start by taking some time in prayer, reflecting on how he might be inviting you to bring him more fully into the center of your life:

Jesus, You give and take according to our needs and your wisdom. On this dark day you laid down your life to give us all a fresh start, a new beginning, and a never-ending stream of marvelous grace and beautiful mercy.

Give us the wisdom, Jesus, to use the minds you gave us to think for ourselves; teach us to develop and listen to our conscience; fill us with courage to stand up for justice and do exactly what you are calling us to do.

When we suffer ourselves, help us to offer that suffering to you. Teach us to carry our cross, remind us to go to you with our pain, and re-energize us with hope when we are ready to give up.

Jesus, today on Good Friday, we pray for anyone who is suffering physically. We ask you to fill them with the rare grace necessary to see and experience suffering as a way to get closer to you. We pray for all those we have wronged in our lives, and for those who have wronged us. We also pray in a special way for everyone who will die today. Hold them in their transition from this life to the next, and comfort their loved ones as you comforted and consoled so many people while you walked on the earth. Amen.

How to Observe Holy Saturday

Holy Saturday is a day of preparation for Easter. For some families this might mean praying together, preparing their home for guests, and dying Easter Eggs. Although there is no Mass offered in the morning, many churches host a short prayer service. When night falls, the Church officially begins its first Easter Celebration at the Easter Vigil Mass! You can reflect on Holy Saturday by watching a Holy Saturday Reflection.

A Prayer for Holy Saturday

The most dominant emotion in our modern society is fear. We are afraid of losing the things we have worked hard to buy, afraid of rejection and failure, afraid of certain types of people, afraid of criticism, of suffering and heartache, of change, afraid to tell people how we really feel.

What was the dominant emotion of Jesus' followers on Holy Saturday? Fear. Fear that they had been misled. Fear that God didn't have a plan. Fear that God had forgotten them.

We all have fears, too. And sometimes, we let those fears paralyze us.

Today, on Holy Saturday, take a few moments to reflect on the fears that are stopping you from living your dreams, the fears that are making it hard for you to trust fully in God, and pray for the courage to overcome those fears:

Jesus, You are courage incarnate. As you hung on the cross for my sins and the sins of the world, you showed me that all things are possible. You knew that life did not end on the cross. It was only the beginning of a new and glorious eternal life.

Jesus, there are areas of my life that make me feel stuck. There are areas of my life I feel like you have forgotten. There are things I have asked for for years, and it seems that you have no answer. I bring all of these things to you today, and I ask you to renew my trust that you have a plan for all of it.

Fill me with courage, Jesus. And give me strength to face all of the difficulties and uncertainties of this life with hope in your wonderful dream for my life. Amen.

What is the Easter Vigil?

The Easter Vigil is a Mass celebrated on Holy Saturday. It begins with a bonfire outside the church, where everyone lights a candle. Mass attendees then process inside the church, filling the dark church with light.

The Easter Vigil is sometimes multiple hours long because the Mass includes a number of special readings from the Old Testament that foreshadow Jesus' death and Resurrection. If the parish has any new catechumens (people who are entering the Catholic Church), oftentimes they will receive their Baptism, First Communion, or Confirmation at the Easter Vigil.

What is Easter Sunday?

Easter Sunday is the day we celebrate Jesus' Resurrection. It is the most important day in history.

The whole world changed on Easter Sunday. It was an earth-shattering, life changing, historic event, and the ultimate proof that Jesus truly is God. Catholics have been celebrating Easter Sunday for over 2,000 years.

How to Celebrate Easter

Easter is not just a one-day celebration; it's an entire season! The time of celebration begins on Easter Sunday and goes all the way through to Pentecost.

As Catholics, the one thing we do more than anything else is celebrate. We celebrate life, death, new life, and eternal life. We celebrate education, innovation, discovery, love, truth, beauty, goodness, forgiveness, reconciliation, unity, family, and new life. We are a people of celebration. And here's the thing—you become what you celebrate. If you celebrate death and destruction, you will become death and destruction. If you celebrate life and creativity, you will become life and creativity. The Church's constant invitation is to celebrate the right things with great vigor, enthusiasm, and regularly.

There are many ways to celebrate Easter. The world celebrates with chocolate eggs, the Easter Bunny, and parties. While Catholics might join in on these festivities, that's not where the celebration ends. First and foremost, Catholics celebrate Easter by attending Mass on Easter Sunday or the Vigil Mass on Holy Saturday. Another great way to celebrate is to read the accounts of the Resurrection in the Gospels and spend time in prayer, meditating on the scenes. How would you respond to the empty tomb? Who's the first person you would tell? Third, reflect on how God is inviting you to bring new life into your relationships, your faith, and your community this Easter Season.

You can also watch an Easter Sunday Reflection.

A Prayer for Easter Sunday

What is it in your life that needs to be resurrected this Easter? Perhaps it's a relationship, maybe it's your personal finances, perhaps it's your health, or maybe it's your career or spirituality. Bring it all to Jesus in prayer on Easter and you'll be amazed at how he fills you with new life!

Jesus, Unleash the power of the Resurrection in my life today. Resurrect the area of my life that needs it today. Help me to stop resisting your grace, stay out of your way, and let you work in me and through me in whatever ways you want.

Jesus, you have conquered death and hatred with love. Teach me to do the same in some small way in my own life. Give me the courage to love when I feel rejected, ignored, unappreciated, forgotten, and taken for granted.

Thank you, Jesus. Thank you. I pray I never let a day pass without these words crossing my lips. Jesus, on this Easter we pray for all those who have lost faith in you, and for anyone who has never encountered you in a way that allowed them to embrace you.

May the power of your Resurrection reignite faith in my life, in the lives of all those I love, and in the lives of the entire Church. Amen.

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