

GOOD FRIDAY

Good Friday is the day on which Catholics commemorate the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Catholics are joined by almost all other Christians in solemn commemoration on this day. It is also a legal holiday around much of the world.

According to the gospels, Jesus was betrayed by Judas on the night of the Last Supper, commemorated on Holy Thursday. The morning following Christ's arrest, he was brought before Annas, a powerful Jewish cleric. Annas condemned Jesus for blasphemy for refusing to repudiate Annas' words that He was the Son of God. From there, Jesus was sent to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of the province.

Pontius Pilate questioned Jesus but found no reason to condemn Him. Instead, he suggested Jewish leaders deal with Jesus according to their own law. But under Roman law, they could not execute Jesus, so they appealed to Pilate to issue the order to kill Jesus.

Pilate appealed to King Herod, who found no guilt in Jesus and sent Him back to Pilate once again. Pilate declared Jesus to be innocent, and washed his hands to show that he wanted nothing to do with Jesus, but the crowds were enraged. To prevent a riot and to protect his station, Pilate reluctantly agreed to execute Jesus and sentenced him to crucifixion. Jesus was convicted of proclaiming himself to be the King of the Jews.

Before his execution, Jesus was flogged, which was a customary practice intended to weaken a victim before crucifixion. Crucifixion was an especially painful method of execution and was perfected by the Romans as such. It was reserved for the worst criminals, and generally Roman citizens, women, and soldiers were exempt in most cases.

During his flogging, the soldiers tormented Jesus, crowning Him with thorns and ridicule.

Following his flogging, Jesus was compelled to carry his cross to the place of His execution, at Calvary. During his walk to the site of His execution, Jesus fell three times and the Roman guards randomly selected Simon, a Cyrene, to help Jesus.

After arrival at Calvary, Jesus was nailed to the cross and crucified between two thieves. One of the thieves repented of his sins and accepted Christ while on the cross beside Him. A titulus, or sign, was posted above Christ to indicate His supposed crime. The titulus read, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." It is commonly abbreviated in Latin as "INRI" (Iesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudaeorum).

During Christ's last few hours on the cross, darkness fell over the whole land. Jesus was given a sponge with sour wine mixed with gall, a weak, bitter painkiller often given to crucified victims.

Good Friday: The Crucifixion of Jesus Christ, the Church and the Sacraments

Prior to death, Jesus spoke His last words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" This line is the opening of Psalm 22, and it may have been common practice to recite lines of songs to deliver a greater message. Properly understood, the last words of Christ were triumphant. Guards then lanced Jesus' side to ensure He was dead.

At the moment of Christ's death, an earthquake occurred, powerful enough to open tombs. The long, thick curtain at the Temple was said to have torn from top to bottom.

Following the incredible events of the day, the body of Christ was removed from the cross and laid in a donated tomb, buried according to custom.

The events of Good Friday are commemorated in the Stations of the Cross, a 14-step devotion often performed by Catholics during Lent and especially on Good Friday. The Stations of the Cross are commonly recited on Fridays during Lent. Another devotional, the Acts of Reparation, may also be prayed.

Good Friday is a day of fasting within the Church. Traditionally, there is no Mass and no celebration of the Eucharist on Good Friday. Church bells are silent. Altars are left bare.

The solemn, muted atmosphere is preserved until the Easter Vigil.

- The Cross - The Sign of the Cross - The Crucifix, Crosses and Symbols of Christ
- On Good Friday, the entire Church fixes her gaze on the Cross at Calvary. Each member of the Church tries to understand at what cost Christ has won our redemption. In the solemn ceremonies of Good Friday, in the Adoration of the Cross, in the chanting of the 'Reproaches', in the reading of the Passion, and in receiving the pre-consecrated Host, we unite ourselves to our Saviour, and we contemplate our own death to sin in the Death of our Lord.
- The Church - stripped of its ornaments, the altar bare, and with the door of the empty tabernacle standing open - is as if in mourning. In the fourth century the Apostolic Constitutions described this day as a 'day of mourning, not a day of festive joy,' and this day was called the 'Pasch (passage) of the Crucifixion.'

The liturgical observance of this day of Christ's suffering, crucifixion and death evidently has been in existence from the earliest days of the Church. No Mass is celebrated on this day, but the service of Good Friday is called the Mass of the Presanctified because Communion (in the species of bread) which had already been consecrated on Holy Thursday is given to the people.

Traditionally, the organ is silent from Holy Thursday until the Alleluia at the Easter Vigil, as are all bells or other instruments, the only music during this period being unaccompanied chant.

The omission of the prayer of consecration deepens our sense of loss because Mass throughout the year reminds us of the Lord's triumph over death, the source of our joy and blessing. The desolate quality of the rites of this day reminds us of Christ's humiliation and suffering during his Passion. We can see that the parts of the Good Friday service correspond to the divisions of Mass:

- Liturgy of the Word - reading of the Passion.
- Intercessory prayers for the Church and the entire world, Christian and non-Christian.
- Veneration of the Cross
- Communion, or the 'Mass of the Pre-Sanctified.'

The Veneration of the Cross

In the seventh century, the Church in Rome adopted the practice of Adoration of the Cross from the Church in Jerusalem, where a fragment of wood believed to be the Lord's cross had been venerated every year on Good Friday since the fourth century. According to tradition, a part of the Holy Cross was discovered by the mother of the emperor Constantine, St. Helen, on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 326. A fifth century account describes this service in Jerusalem. A coffer of gold-plated silver containing the wood of the cross was brought forward. The bishop placed the relic on the a table in the chapel of the Crucifixion and the faithful approached it, touching brow and eyes and lips to the wood as the priest said (as every priest has done ever since): 'Behold, the Wood of the Cross.'

Adoration or veneration of an image or representation of Christ's cross does not mean that we are actually adoring the material image, of course, but rather what it represents. In kneeling before the crucifix and kissing it we are paying the highest honour to the our Lord's cross as the instrument of our salvation. Because the Cross is inseparable from His sacrifice, in reverencing His Cross we are, in effect, adoring Christ. Thus we affirm: 'We adore Thee, O Christ, and we bless Thee because by Thy Holy Cross Thou has Redeemed the World.'