



Spiritual Practices, Scripture Lessons, and Prayers for Holy Week

Holy Week is a solemn week of extra prayer and fasting. It involves the Triduum: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil. During those three days we recall—and through our prayer participate in—Jesus’ Last Supper with his disciples, his arrest, trial, and execution, the long day of silence (Holy Saturday) while his body rested in the grave, and his Resurrection on Easter. The many readings of Scripture surrounding the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ give us a lot of material for reflection and prayer.

Unfortunately, the rest of the world does not stop or slow down to give us extra time for all this liturgy and church attendance. We may be fortunate to have an employer who gives us Good Friday as a day off. But daily life continues, and our minds spin with scores of other stories that threaten to obscure the Jesus story.

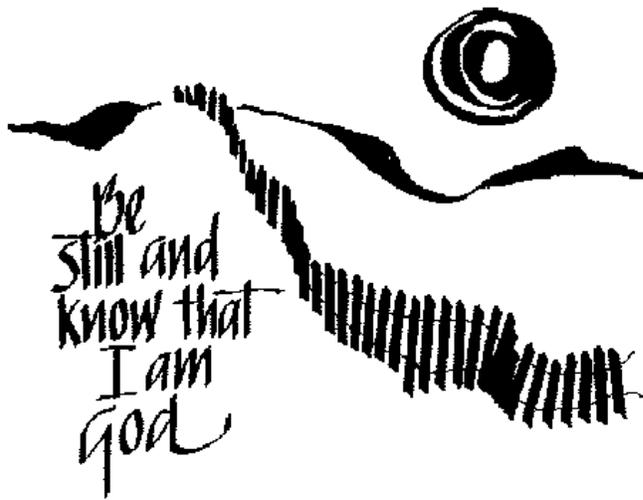
How can we maintain some realm of holy quiet? How to “do Holy Week”, especially if we will not be participating in all the special church liturgies at this time?

Here are just a few suggestions. I hope you’re helped by at least one or two of them.



PASCHAL TRIDUUM

- Spend a little time each day listening to music that helps you slow down. It doesn't matter what kind of music—hymns, jazz, folksong, symphony pieces, songs with meaningful words, or pieces that are instrumental only—as long as the listening helps you breathe more slowly and go to a place deeper in your spirit.
- Prepare at least one meal with special care for the people in your home (or, if you live alone, for you and a guest or two), and make certain all of you sit down together to eat it. It doesn't have to be fancy or expensive. Maybe there's a soup recipe from Great-Grandma, or a certain homemade bread that sets the tone by sending fragrance through the house.
- Choose one of the Passion narratives—from any of the four Gospels—and read it aloud to yourself over the course of the week. Don't try to learn anything new or have a profound experience; simply read the story, asking God to help this story live in you better this year than it ever has before.
- While you're sitting—maybe at the end of the day, trying to unwind in front of the television or in a favorite chair—try drawing aspects of Holy Week. Use whatever paper and pen(cil) is available and express something about symbols that are meaningful to you: cross, lily, bread, chalice, table, garden, hands, faces, a road...



Practice the Daily Examen

The Examen

The Examen prayer is a prayerful review of the last 24 hours. It can tune us into how our daily choices—big and small—and our use of God’s gifts, contribute to our growing closer in union with God and creation (our purpose). It can help us examine movements of consolation and desolation throughout the day as well as our spiritual freedom and adaptability. In other words, the Examen helps us be aware of the value of our lived experience, our interior feelings, the movement of God, and how we make decisions on a day-to-day basis.

There are many variations to the Examen. Here are Ignatius’ original five steps to it:

1. Recognize blessings and thank God.
2. Ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate your review.
3. Review the day. (Where did you experience God in your day? / Where did you deny God in your day?)
4. Ask for forgiveness.
5. Amend to live tomorrow anew.



HOLY THURSDAY OR MAUNDY THURSDAY April 14

SCRIPTURE: Exodus 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14

Psalms 116:1-2, 12-19

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Preparation

As you begin this time of quiet prayer, I invite you to find a comfortable place to sit with your back straight and your legs planted on the ground. Take a few moments to breathe in and breathe out.

Spend this time centering yourself to listen to what God may be saying to you during this time of prayer, to listen to what rises up in your heart. Close your eyes for a few moments. As you sit with your eyes closed, use these or similar words: “Here I am, Lord. Here I am.” When you are ready, open your eyes and pray.

Washing Feet

The dining table is scattered with the remains of a meal enjoyed by all there. Imagine you are sitting at this table. Your hands are on your belly, and you’re feeling full and satisfied. The food and wine were savory and sweet. It brought back such memories of meals you shared with friends and family through the years—meals where love was shown, forgiveness offered, and hurts healed. A smile comes across your face as you recall the hours your mother spent in the kitchen getting ready to feed those she loved. Humming softly, she would carefully knead and fold the dough that would become her delicious, crusty bread.

There is much chatter around this table. You look over at these people you have traveled with through many towns and villages, bringing the message of hope and love. A peace comes over you, a peace that tells you what a good job you've done. Across the table you see Jesus. He is looking around the table, but his face is serious. He stands up, puts a towel around his waist, and comes toward you. You don't understand what's happening. Jesus stands before you, wrapped in a towel and carrying a basin of water. He looks at you and asks you a question. What does Jesus ask you? How do you respond?

Jesus kneels in front of you. You move back in your chair. "No, Jesus. Please get up," you say. He looks in your eyes. His eyes seem to look right into your soul. He smiles and offers his hand to take your foot. You hesitate. *How can this be?* you think. Jesus gently cups your foot in his hand. With his other hand, he pours the warm, perfumed water on your foot. He looks at you and smiles. It feels like there are just the two of you there. Jesus speaks to you. What does he say? What do you respond?

You look down and notice how dirty your feet are from walking on the dusty paths. Jesus simply and gently washes them and then dries them with the towel around his waist. Your eyes fill with tears. Here is Jesus, whom you left your home to follow, washing your feet like a servant. You lower your face and quietly weep. Jesus reaches up and puts his hands on your face. He gently whispers to you, "You are loved. *You are loved.*" He stands and hands you the jug of water and basin. Taking a towel, you wrap it around your waist and...

Do I let Jesus accept me for who I am, "dirty feet" and all? Who are the people in my life whose "feet" need to be washed? On this Holy Thursday, how can I accept Jesus' call to follow his example of service?

Concluding Prayer

Glory be to the Father,
and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning,
is now, and ever shall be,
world without end.
Amen.



GOOD FRIDAY April 15

SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Psalm 22

Hebrews 10:16-25 or Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9

John 18:1-19:42

Preparation

As you begin this time of quiet prayer, I invite you to find a comfortable place to sit with your back straight and your legs planted on the ground. Take a few moments to breathe in and breathe out.

Spend this time centering yourself to listen to what God may be saying to you during this time of prayer, to listen to what rises up in your heart. Close your eyes for a few moments. As you sit with your eyes closed, use these or similar words: "Here I am, Lord. Here I am." When you are ready, open your eyes and pray.

Is it Finished?

The day begins with a bright sun and a blue sky. Imagine you're walking along a street feeling joyful and peaceful. You pass by people who are smiling because the day makes everyone feel alive and fresh. Springtime has that effect on people. After walking about an hour, you notice that the sky is turning dark. Big, gray and black clouds have moved in, as if a tremendous storm is about to happen. You think of finding a place to wait it out, but something keeps you moving forward, pulling you to continue. You see a hill in the distance. People are standing around what looks like several men hanging from trees. Getting closer, you see that they are crosses. The man on the center cross is covered in blood and sores. On his head

is a wooden crown with thorns that pierce his skin. You see that it is Jesus. His eyes catch yours. He looks at you with eyes that don't show pain, but peace. He speaks to you in a voice that only you can hear. What does Jesus say to you? Is there something you want to say in response to Jesus?

Some of the people around you are crying. Some are yelling at Jesus, telling him to come down if he truly is who he says he is. You want to turn away, to walk away, but you can't. You stand there caught in the horror, yet knowing this is not the conclusion to Jesus' life. You want to tell those around you that this is not the end, that there is more. It is not finished.

Someone comes up to you, wrapped in a cloak, and stands beside you. You can't see his face, but he holds out a hand to you. In his hand, you see the nail mark. You realize it is Jesus. He removes the cloak from around his face as he turns to you. He looks at you with a peaceful, warm smile. What do you say to Jesus? How does he respond?

As Jesus stands beside you, you feel a power coming from him. It makes you feel safe and, at the same time, energized. Your mind is full of questions and races from one thing to another, but you remain quiet. Jesus turns to you again and says, "You know this is not the end. It isn't finished. It has just begun. And now, it's up to you." He looks at you, smiles, and slowly walks into the crowd and disappears. You look up at the scene before you. On the cross, Jesus lifts his head and says, "It is finished." Your eyes fill with tears. You whisper to yourself, *No, it is not finished. No. It has just begun. What are the crosses in your life that you need to bring to Jesus so he can help carry them for you? How have you brought the good news of Jesus to others in your life?*

Concluding Prayer

Glory be to the Father,
and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning,
is now, and ever shall be,
world without end.
Amen.



SCRIPTURE LESSONS FOR THE EASTER VIGIL April 17

Old Testament Readings and Psalms:

Genesis 1:1-2:4a and Psalm 136:1-9, 23-26

Genesis 7:1-5, 11-18; 8:6-18; 9:8-13 and Psalm 46

Genesis 22:1-18 and Psalm 16

Exodus 14:10-31; 15:20-21 and Exodus 15:1b-13, 17-18

Isaiah 55:1-11 and Isaiah 12:2-6

Baruch 3:9-15, 3:32-4:4 or Proverbs 8:1-8, 19-21; 9:4b-6 and Psalm 19

Ezekiel 36:24-28 and Psalm 42, 43

Ezekiel 37:1-14 and Psalm 143 - Zephaniah 3:14-20 and Psalm 98

New Testament Reading and Psalm

Romans 6:3-11 and Psalm 114

Gospel - Luke 24:1-12