

HOLY WEEK

Christ Church Cathedral, Victoria



For Christians, Holy Week is our “Great Week:” without it, there is no Saviour, no forgiveness, no eucharistic sustenance for our daily life, no hope of eternal life with those we love — indeed nothing at all that makes us identifiably “Christian.” For this reason, this is the one week of the year when the Church steps into “real time,” and journeys day by day, even hour by hour, with Jesus.

The liturgies of Holy Week are essentially the successive acts of a single drama, beginning with Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, and reaching its climax, when light springs miraculously out the darkness, at the Great Vigil of Easter. This accounts for the fact that there is no Dismissal at the end of services in Holy Week. It isn’t over until it’s over.



Palm Sunday

This day marks the beginning of our Holy Week observance. We take our place with the crowd who hailed Jesus as king, waving branches of palm to acclaim him, and processing to the altar, just as Jesus rode into Jerusalem.

We do this knowing that at the self-same moment Jesus chose to come into the city from the west on the back of an ass, the Roman Procurator, Pontius Pilate, and his entourage were making a grand and armed entrance by horseback (as was their wont at Passover) from the east. Without a doubt, Jesus was staging an “anti-Procession” into Jerusalem, and encouraging his followers to adopt a view of power and authority radically opposed to that espoused by Rome.

This is the daring act which launches the sequence of events leading to the execution of Jesus on Good Friday.

Wednesday in Holy Week

Wednesday has traditionally been observed as the day of the betrayal by Judas. Much ink has been spilt speculating upon the motives of Judas, on his ultimate destiny, on whether he had any real choice, or whether the betrayal was even necessary to seal the fate of Jesus.

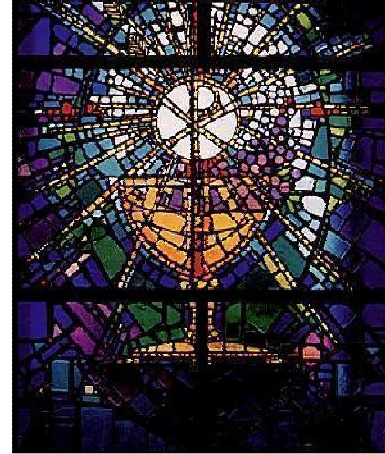
In recent years, however, some communities have chosen a different story to highlight on Wednesday in Holy Week, and that is the anointing of Jesus by an unnamed woman. As she pours the costly perfume over his head two days before the Passover, the disciples scold her for wasting money which could have been spent on good works. But Jesus replies, “Leave her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. Truly, I tell you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world what she has done will be told in remembrance of her” (Mark 14.6-9).

It is ironic that she who did a “beautiful thing” for Jesus has in fact not taken her place in our Holy Week narratives. The name of Judas has been inscribed on our memories for ever. Hers has been lost.

This year our Wednesday noon liturgy will focus not on the betrayal, but upon the loving preparation of Jesus to bear the burden of his passion. In the evening, at Tenebrae (a service of light and shadows), we will draw closer to the treachery of Judas.

THE SOLEMN TRIDUUM Maundy Thursday

Maundy Thursday takes its name from the Latin word *mandatum*, or commandment, and specifically from Jesus' words during John's account of the Last Supper, "I give you a new commandment that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another" (John 13.34). We note, however, that as St Paul tells it in 1 Corinthians 11, Jesus seems to lay a rather different charge upon the disciples. He breaks the bread, and shares the cup, and tells them to "Do this in remembrance of me." Perhaps, though, there are not two commandments, but only one, for surely their meaning is not so very different. After all, to live as eucharistic people — that is, as people whose lives are broken open, even poured out, in the service of others — is precisely to love as Jesus has loved.



The Maundy Thursday liturgy is rich with the busy-ness of this night in Jesus' life. We gather principally to give thanks for the institution of the eucharist, this pledge of Christ's presence on the eve of his leave-taking. In that context, though, we are drawn to themes of servanthood and betrayal, of agony (although not in John's gospel) and arrest. The Lord of glory is stripped of all but the quiet dignity that none can remove. We enact this symbolically by stripping the church of all its hangings and adornments. Similarly, we remove the Reserved Sacrament to an Altar of Repose (in the chapel), where it will remain as the sign of Christ's presence in Gethsemane until midnight, the traditional time of his arrest.



North American Christians have often struggled with how best to symbolise the calling to servanthood in the context of the Maundy Thursday liturgy. The washing of feet, which has enjoyed a resurgence in the past 20 years or so, has no clear cultural referent in a shoes-and-socks climate, and runs the risk of drawing unseemly attention to the self-effacing humility of the priest, rather than the self-offering servanthood of Jesus, which is the proper focus of the evening. Another option, which is the practice here at the Cathedral is the ceremonial washing of the altar. Here again, the priest takes a towel, and water from the font (the source of all cleansing), and with a cedar sponge, dashes water five times onto the altar (symbolising the five wounds of Christ). Thus is the table made ready to receive the Paschal Victim. There is a

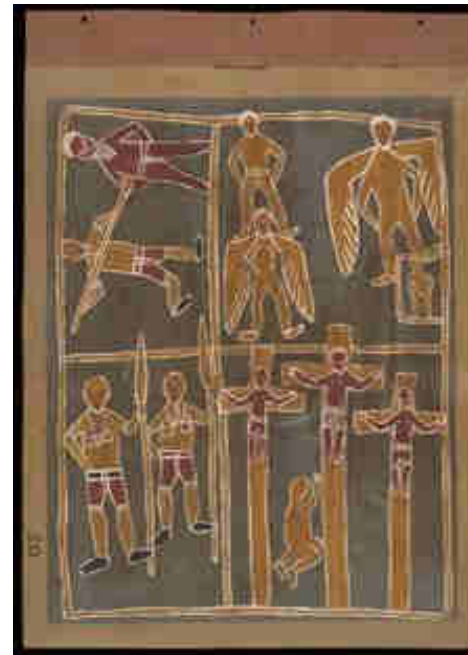
sobering solemnity about this act, which keeps us focused on the One who is to die.

It is a short and logical step to the usual conclusion of the Maundy Thursday rite, which is the extinguishing of all light, and the chaotic flight, in silence, of all who came to pray. As John ominously says as Judas takes leave of the Last Supper to go and transact the betrayal of that fellowship, "It was *night*." Jesus is deserted by friend and foe alike. The church will remain in darkness, and neither organ nor bells will sound again until the Gloria is sung at the Easter Vigil.

The Garden Watch

Following the Maundy Thursday liturgy, the church will remain open till 10.00 p.m. for those who are able to spend some time in prayer. The Garden Watch is rooted in Jesus' request to Peter, James, and John that they come to Gethsemane and keep watch with him. It was a small thing to ask, and yet — for whatever reason — they were oblivious to the Occasion; their hearts had not the fearfulness that makes for fretful insomnia, and they fell asleep. Three times. We therefore test the steadfastness of our hearts in humility, and in the knowledge they lacked — that short hours from now, it will be the time not for prayer, but for dying. As the Watch concludes, Compline (the Church's nighttime office) will be recited, and the Sacrament, which has been the sign of Jesus' own watchful, and prayerful presence in the Garden, will be removed from the Altar of Repose, and the very last light in the church extinguished.

Good Friday



The indignities of his passion and the savagery of crucifixion mean that Jesus wedded not only our flesh, but the whole human condition, to his dying — including excruciating pain, paralyzing fear, doubt, resistance, and our appalling capacity for violence and the miscarriage of justice. All these things he takes to the grave, not to leave them there (for clearly, they continue to characterise our human experience), but that through his rising, they might be given a valence for grace. God loves our flawed humanity too much to leave it in the dust. He will protect the possibility of communion with himself, even if it means having constantly to forgive us.

This is the gift that the crucifixion inaugurates. The Liturgy of the Day begins with penitence, and is the one liturgy of the year when a confession of sin goes unanswered by a word of absolution. Perhaps this is because we need to understand that the prayer of absolution is shorthand for all that this liturgy commemorates: it is the

liturgy itself which is Christ's word of forgiveness. And so we rehearse the whole sorry tale of Jesus' passion and death; and we dare, in what is called "the Solemn Intercession," to ask God to filter our imperfect desires and petitions through the perfect self-offering of his Son. Next, a large wooden cross is carried into the church (an act we are meant to have in mind when, at the Easter Vigil, the deacon carries the Paschal Candle to announce the Resurrection), and the whole community is invited to come forward to the communion rails and to kneel in penitent meditation.

Easter Eve — The Great Vigil

The Great Vigil is without doubt the most important — and glorious — liturgy of the entire year.

We gather in darkness and silence as if at the Tomb itself, watching and waiting for God to split a second and bring life out of death.

Like any family in the face of crisis or bereavement, we begin by telling our communal stories, which taken together recount some of the signal moments in the history of God's dealings with us. At the Cathedral, we incorporate something of the ancient "oral tradition," whereby some of these stories are told and not "read," in a manner which will be memorable and relevant in our time and culture. It's a little like reviewing a good mystery novel: we actually know how the story turns out. In this part of the service we go back and see for ourselves that it couldn't have been otherwise.



Next, suddenly, a new fire leaps into the darkness, and from it the Paschal Candle, representing the Risen Christ, is lit. A deacon carries the Candle, leading a procession into the church, just as a pillar of fire led the Israelites out of their bondage in Egypt. He or she then calls the whole created order ("Rejoice now, heavenly hosts and choirs of angels") to sing God's praise in the Exsultet, which is one of the most magnificent and ancient chants of the Christian Church.

So high is our confidence, that we dare to invite others to share with us in the salvation Christ offers. The Easter Vigil is thus the Church's premier occasion for baptism, and for

the renewal of baptismal vows. For if baptism signifies dying with Christ and rising again, what better time for it than the very night we celebrate this mystery? There is little more moving than the decision of an adult to embrace the Christian Way. It is our practice at the Cathedral to take some of the water from the font and to sprinkle it upon the Congregation who have also restated their intention to follow Christ.

The Vigil then bears fruit in the Presider's proclamation, "Alleluia! Christ is risen," and the people's response, "He is risen indeed, Alleluia!" Suddenly, the whole church, dark and silent, is ablaze with light, and alive with song and the ringing of bells. In a stunningly impressive moment, the church is visibly transformed before the very eyes of the faithful: the altar is dressed, flowers appear, and a banquet is made ready. What follows is the eucharist: the greatest of Great Thanksgivings, a celebration of the first magnitude, and our happy participation in the first-fruits of the Resurrection.

Easter Day

Easter Day is to the Vigil as high noon is to the dawn: it adds nothing new, but does afford the full flowering of what is but recently broken from the bud. It is the first of a Fifty Day celebration, and is the Event from which every other Sunday derives its identity as a "little Easter".

— MAT, revised 2017



Holy Week Services in 2017

Palm Sunday—April 11, 2017

- 8.00 a.m. Said Eucharist
9.15 a.m. Procession with Palms and Sung Eucharist
Gather at Pioneer Square
11.00 a.m. Procession & Sung Eucharist
4.30 p.m. Music and Readings for Passiontide

Wednesday in Holy Week — April 12, 2017

- 12.15 p.m. Said Eucharist—The Anointing of Jesus
7.00 p.m. Tenebrae (Chapel of the New Jerusalem)

The Solemn Triduum

Maundy Thursday—April 13, 2017

- 7.30 p.m. Commemoration of the Institution of the Eucharist &
Ceremonial Stripping of the Church and Altar
9.00 p.m. Garden Watch
The Church will be open for personal prayer until 10.00 p.m.
10.00 p.m. Compline

Good Friday—April 14, 2017

- 9.00 a.m. Procession through the City with the Cross
Gather at Pioneer Square.
12.00 p.m. The Good Friday Liturgy

The Great Vigil—Saturday, April 15, 2017

- 8.00 p.m. Stories, the Lighting of the Paschal Candle, the Reaffirmation of our
Christian Covenant, and the First Eucharist of Easter

Remember to bring a bell to ring!

Remember to bring a bell for Easter!

Easter Day—April 16, 2017

- 8.00 a.m. Said Eucharist (with hymn)
10.30 a.m. Procession and Sung Eucharist

Please note the time! This service marks Canon Michael Gormley's last day as the Cathedral's Director of Music. There will be a formal occasion in June to fête him properly. But in the meantime, we can't let him go without a party: Please plan to stay for cake and a celebratory toast.

- 4.30 p.m. Cathedral Evensong