



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Focus Article:

- 📖 The Paschal Triduum
(Easter, pp. 19-26)

Suggested Article:

- 📖 The “Real Presence” in Footwashing
(Easter, pp. 74-76)
- 📖 Christ’s Last Words from the Cross
(Easter, pp. 82-87)

What do you think?

Was this study guide useful for your personal or group study? Please send your suggestions to Christian_Reflection@baylor.edu.

Christian Reflection

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The Paschal Triduum

The Paschal Triduum, the last three days of Holy Week, originally was geared toward catechumens being initiated into the faith on Holy Saturday night. But the customs of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday continue to hold great significance for the Church as a whole.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Matthew 28:1-9

Responsive Reading[†]

Let those who are devout and love God rejoice in this beautiful, radiant Feast.

Let those who are grateful servants be glad and enter into the joy of the Lord. ...

Christ is risen, and death is destroyed!

Christ is risen, and the powers of Satan are defeated!

Christ is risen, and the angels celebrate!

Christ is risen, and life has been set free!

Christ is risen, and the grave has given up the dead,
for Christ, in his resurrection,
has become the first-fruits of those that sleep.

To him be the glory and the power throughout all eternity. Amen.

John Chrysostom (c. 347-407)

Reflection

The mystery of Easter “is no mere series of past historical events, but an ongoing, life-giving reality into which we are called to enter every day of our lives and especially during its annual commemoration,” Michael Foley notes. Early Christian practices to mark Jesus’ saving passion, death, and resurrection, as well as the creative regional devotions of Christians through the years, can provide rich resources for entering the reality of Easter.

The traditions of the Triduum – the three days from Holy Thursday evening through Easter Sunday – are best seen against the backdrop of Lent and the preparation of fourth century catechumens for baptism. Their fasts and vigils have been adapted in many ways by other faithful Christians preparing themselves for Easter.

- ▶ *Maundy Thursday* is named for the *Mandatum novum* or “new commandment” – to love one another as he loved them – that Christ gave the Apostles while washing their feet before the last supper. Christian monarchs once washed their poorest subjects’ feet on Holy Thursday in commemoration; some Baptists have foot-washing services on that day; and the Mass of the Lord’s Supper, still celebrated in the Catholic Church and Anglican communion, incorporates foot-washing. *Tenebrae*, a special form of Matins and Lauds (the Divine Office prayers around dawn) on Maundy Thursday, uses darkness, light, and chaotic sounds to help worshipers experience the confusion and hope of Christ’s death and resurrection. Many denominations celebrate forms of *Tenebrae*.
- ▶ *Good Friday*, the day of Jesus’ crucifixion, has been a day of lamentation and fasting since the Church sheltered in the catacombs. Even after the forty-day Lent became universal, some Christians observed Good Friday fasts with added rigor; for instance, the Irish consumed



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nothing but water or tea. Ironically, this day also became associated with special foods: in England, hot cross buns (originating in the fourteenth century) were only distributed on Good Friday. Other practices like the veneration of the cross during worship, performing special Passion music, and holding devotions on the Seven Last Words of Christ developed gradually.

- ▶ *Holy Saturday* in the early church concluded with an all-night Easter Vigil. Catechumens were baptized with great ceremony in the darkness before the light of Easter morning. In the second century the faithful kept a forty-hour “Passion Fast” from the hour Christ died on Good Friday until the hour he rose from the dead on Sunday morning, spending Holy Saturday in prayerful waiting. But, unofficially, there was much activity in homes preparing for the great feast of Easter.

Observing the Triduum helps us to fulfill the wise exhortation of Pope Leo the Great (d. 461): “Because the entire Paschal Mystery was instituted for the remission of sins, let us imitate what we hope to celebrate.” As we celebrate these holy days, we join Christ as he journeys from the upper room to the open tomb.

Study Questions

1. How do the worship services of the Triduum invite us into the biblical story?
2. Review the worship practices that Michael Foley, Bill Leonard, and Arthur Boers mention in their articles. How does the history behind these traditions deepen your understanding and engagement in them?
3. Which Triduum practices of the early Church and different Christian cultural traditions already help your congregation and family engage with the reality of Easter? Which new-to-you practices might benefit your congregation?

Departing Hymn: “We Welcome Glad Easter”

We welcome glad Easter when Jesus arose
and won a great victory over his foes.
*Then raise your glad voices, all Christians, and sing,
bring glad Easter praises to Jesus, your King.*

We tell how the women came early that day
and there at the tomb found the stone rolled away.
Refrain

We sing of the angel who said: “Do not fear!
Your Savior is risen and he is not here.”
Refrain

We think of the promise which Jesus did give:
“That he who believes in me also shall live!”
Refrain

Anonymous
Tune: ST. DENIO

† John Chrysostom, “Easter Sermon,” en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paschal_Homily.

The Paschal Triduum

Lesson Plans

| Abridged Plan | Standard Plan |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| Prayer | Prayer |
| Scripture Reading | Scripture Reading |
| Meditation | Meditation |
| Reflection (skim all) | Reflection (all sections) |
| Questions 1 and 3 | Questions (selected) |
| Departing Hymn | Departing Hymn |

Teaching Goals

1. To review the origin and elements of the Triduum.
2. To discuss ways of celebrating the Triduum in congregations today.
3. To consider how we can enter the life-giving reality of the Easter season.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 4-5 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Easter (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested articles before the group meeting. For the departing hymn “We Welcome Glad Easter” locate the familiar tune ST. DENIO in your church’s hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ (www.hymntime.com/tch/).

Begin with a Story

The worship services during the Triduum have long been a way for Christians to imaginatively join Christ on the final stages of his ministry from the Last Supper through the Resurrection. For example, many Christians celebrate a Tenebrae service in the darkness before Maundy Thursday. Fifteen candles on a triangular candelabrum called a “hearse” are extinguished one by one after each psalm or canticle, until only the topmost candle remains. When that candle is hidden, representing Christ’s burial in the tomb, worshippers make a chaos of noise (stomping their feet or banging their hymnals against pews) to commemorate the confusion of nature at the death of its Creator and God. The candle is then restored, anticipating Christ’s glorious resurrection.

As Tenebrae (and other worship services in the Triduum) engage the senses and capture the imagination in wonderful ways, we begin to interpret all of life through the lens of Christ’s death and resurrection. This is beautifully illustrated by the character Cordelia in Evelyn Waugh’s most famous novel, *Brideshead Revisited*:

“They’ve closed the chapel at Brideshead...mummy’s Requiem was the last mass said there. After she was buried the priest came in—I was there alone. I don’t think he saw me—and took out the altar stone and put it in his bag; then he burned the wads of wool with the holy oil on them and threw the ash outside; he emptied the holy-water stoop and blew out the lamp in the sanctuary, and left the tabernacle open and empty, as though from now on it was always to be Good Friday. I suppose none of this makes any sense to you, Charles, poor agnostic. I stayed there till he was gone, and then, suddenly, there wasn’t any chapel there any more, just an oddly decorated room. I can’t tell you what it felt like. You’ve never been to Tenebrae, I suppose?”

“Never.”

“Well, if you had you’d know what the Jews felt about their temple. *Quomodo sedet sola civitas* [how lonely sits the city]...it’s a beautiful chant. You ought to go once, just to hear it.” (Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited*, [New York, Little, Brown and Company, 2012 (1944)], 253-254.)

In this study of the Triduum, we will consider how we can draw upon the Church’s worship traditions to enter the life-giving reality of the Easter season.

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God to unite you with Christ this Triduum as you participate through worship and personal devotion in his journey to the empty tomb.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Matthew 28:1-9 from a modern translation.

Responsive Reading

The leader begins and the group reads the lines in bold print.

Reflection

This study focuses on how Christians in different places and times have observed the Triduum in corporate worship, personal devotions, and cultural practices. Allow the rich history of the Triduum to inspire renewed commitment to following Christ on his journey from the upper room on Maundy Thursday to Gethsemane, the cross on Good Friday, the grave on Holy Saturday, and the Resurrection on Easter morning.

Study Questions

1. Maundy Thursday marks the day that Christ celebrated the Passover with his Apostles in the upper room. Many traditions incorporate footwashing into their worship to commemorate Christ washing his Apostles' feet and saying "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35).
Good Friday is the day that Christ was crucified, which is why it is the most observed day of fasting and self-denial in the Church. Many Christians incorporate the veneration of the cross in their worship on this day, and participate in devotions like the Seven Last Words of Christ to remember the sacrifice of Jesus as described in the Bible.
Holy Saturday is the day when Christ was buried in the tomb. Many traditions hold long vigil services in the evening, which help members participate in the painful grief of Jesus' disciples who saw him die.
Easter Sunday is the day commemorating Christ's resurrection. This day of great feasting and joy often begins with early worship as members join Mary Magdalene in greeting Jesus on the morning of his resurrection.
2. Knowing where our forms of worship and practices of devotion came from and how they developed can deepen our understanding of how they are meant to shape our discipleship. This helps us to value them more. Ask members to choose one thing they learned from reading Michael Foley's article and describe how it increased their understanding of and appreciation for the worship and practices of the Triduum.
3. Divide members into two groups. Invite the first group to consider how your congregation already celebrates the Triduum. Ask the group to make connections between the worship practices of your church and the history of the Triduum that Michael Foley describes in his article, the valuable practice of footwashing that Bill Leonard describes, and the rich devotion of the Seven Last Words of Christ that Arthur Boers writes about in his review.
Invite the second group to discuss the worship and devotion practices that were new to them. Which ones are interesting or inspiring? Which ones seem strange? Are there any practices which would be suited to your congregation in worship or in personal devotion?
If the Triduum is totally new to your congregation, stay in one group and discuss what seems most valuable in celebrating Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday before jumping into the joy of Easter Sunday.

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.