

God, Life, and Everything "Easter"

Happy Easter! I know, we're still in the throws of Holy Week, but by the time you get to the next column, Easter Day will have already passed.

Still, there is a lot going on between now and Easter, and each chapter of the story builds on the previous chapter. Wednesday's Tenebrae (for those churches that observe it) gradually extinguishes the light so that we sit in the darkness of the days leading to the tomb.

Maundy Thursday (known in some churches as Holy Thursday) brings the institution of the Last Supper and Christ's command to the apostles to wash feet. In our tradition, the service concludes with the Stripping of the Altar in which the entire sanctuary is stripped bare leaving a tomb-like space.

Traditionally, that service is followed by something called The Watch, during which parishioners sit through the night in the church, reminding us of Jesus' request to his apostles to stay awake and watch with him before his arrest. It can be a difficult but powerful night.

And we all know Good Friday. It is one of the most ironic days of the church year because we call "good" a day in which our leader is executed. Actually, not everyone calls it good. In German, the word is "Karfreitag" which means "sorrow Friday."

Whatever we call it, it's a tough day, and we make it tough on ourselves. After the Watch, we go to the Community Walk of the Cross. There, Christians of all denominations walk through town carrying a very large, very heavy wooden cross, stopping at fourteen "stations" to remember Jesus' torture and execution.

Typically, churches have an additional Good Friday liturgy. At ours, we bring that same large cross into the church and ponder the sacrifice Christ made. We hand a nail to each parishioner as a reminder that we, too, are capable of straying horribly from God's love.

And then we rest Saturday until the night. At night, we light the "new fire" outside of the church to begin what is known as the Easter Vigil. That is perhaps one of my favorite services because of its mysterious tone. Once we have lit the fire, we process into the church, led by a deacon carrying the Paschal Candle. We sit in near darkness as the Exsultet is chanted. Then we read several passages of the Old Testament called the "salvation history." Only after Christ's resurrection is proclaimed do we turn on all the lights, bathing the church in a brightness that would not have been noticeable without the darkness.

The Easter Vigil is technically the first service of Easter. But most people don't really think the holiday has arrived yet. They're waiting for the morning. Maybe they go to the Sunrise Service (there's one at the Vanderbilt estate), or maybe they go to their own church's services. Either way, they go with brightness and cheer because Death has lost its sting and Life prevails.

And of course, we have fun traditions on Easter. The kids bring flowers to put in a cross which we then set outside for the world to see. After the service, we have a good old fashioned Easter Egg hunt.

Please note: there is absolutely zero theological significance to an Easter Egg hunt. People color eggs (or stuff plastic eggs with chocolate), hide the eggs, and then watch the kids chase after the eggs. It's just a game, and we do it because it's fun. On a

joyous day celebrating the resurrection of Christ, a little fun for the kids seems highly appropriate.

Now, I don't know about you, but after church, there's the obligatory Easter dinner. Whether you're hosting or coming as a guest (or eating out), it's a nice way to finish up a busy, difficult and exhilarating week.

If you want to worship this Holy Week and Easter, join us at St. James' (4526 Albany Post Road, Hyde Park)! We'd be delighted to welcome you. Maundy Thursday and Good Friday services are at 7:00 pm. The Easter Vigil is at 8:00 pm. And on Easter morning, you can join us at 8:00 am or 10:00 am (the Egg Hunt only after 10:00).

So Happy Easter! May it be a day of blessing and peace.