Grace Notes in Miniature for Wednesday, April 8, 2020

Dear all:

As we reach the middle of Holy Week we prepare to transition into the Triduum.

Here is some information on these holiest of days from the Simcoe-Muskoka Board’s “Faith Matters” newsletter, Thanks to Dr Murray Watson for sharing!

Celebrating differently in these holy days
The seven days between Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday make up the most meaningful, the most spiritually rich, and the most powerful week of the whole Christian year. On Palm Sunday, we marked Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, hailed by the people as the Messiah, the “Son of David” that the Jewish people had been awaiting for centuries, to liberate them from the yoke of slavery, and to bring true justice and peace into the world. Beginning with sundown on Thursday (important feasts always begin the night before, following the Jewish way of reckoning the day), we enter into the Easter Triduum, a Latin term that means a unified three-day period. These three days lead us deeply into the mystery of who Jesus is, and into the heart of Christianity itself: the Resurrection of Jesus from death into a new and transformed life, which is the basis of our entire Christian faith and hope.

The British theologian Aidan Nichols writes: “The resurrection… tells us that something has happened so world-shaking that from now on, everything else we know about reality must be related to this, not the other way round.” And Scripture scholar William Barclay said: “The claim that Jesus rose from the dead is a claim so vast and far-reaching in its importance and in its implications that there is no half-way… about it. It is either the greatest single fact in history, or, if it is not true, it is the greatest deception in history.” As Christians, we believe that these days truly changed the world forever, and they impact every thought, action and decision of our lives. We believe that the Triduum is of cosmic importance—and so we observe it with awe, with humility, with spiritual openness, and with loving devotion.

This year, however, we will observe the Triduum differently—in our homes with our family members, instead of in our church buildings. We will miss much of the liturgical pageantry—the hymns, the rituals, the flowers, the banners and the crowds. But the Biblical texts continue to speak to us, and invite us to renew our faith in Jesus, as our source of guidance and hope in these troubled and confusing times.

(Check out yesterday’s “Grace Notes in Miniature” for prayer suggestions for home use.)
Holy/Maundy Thursday - Gospel: John 13:1-15
The Triduum begins on Holy Thursday evening, when many Christian churches commemorate the Last Supper, and Jesus’ gift of his Body and Blood in the Eucharist. Surprisingly, however, the Gospel reading chosen for this day is not the account of Jesus instituting the Eucharist, but of his kneeling down in humility and love to wash the feet of his disciples—an act usually performed by a slave in that culture. And yet the two are not unconnected: the sacrificial, self-giving love revealed in Jesus washing of the apostles’ feet is the same sacrificial, self-giving love that will be most fully displayed in Jesus’ crucifixion and death—which we believe continues to be accessible to us in the Eucharist. And, we believe, the Eucharist is meant to nourish us so that we may live lives of generous, loving service to others; as Jesus says, “if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you”. In thousands of ways every day, in our loving service of family members, friends, colleagues and strangers, we put the message of Holy Thursday into practice. (The older name, Maundy Thursday, is a corruption of the Latin word mandatum, (“commandment,” describing Jesus’ commandment to serve others). It is no coincidence that the traditional Latin chant for the washing of the feet is “Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est” (Wherever there is charity and love, God himself is there)—and it continues: “Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor” (It is Christ’s love which has gathered us together). The chant reminds us that Christian living is intimately linked both to community and to loving service. We are not alone—and we are to care for each other! It was after the Last Supper that Jesus was betrayed and arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, just outside the walls of the city of Jerusalem.

(For us in HCDSB, the washing of the feet is a very important icon, as new administrators are commissioned by making a promise to care for their school communities and receive a towel as a sign that they have accepted that commitment.)

Good Friday - Gospel: John 18:1-19:42
Good Friday is an especially solemn day, which focusses our attention on Jesus’ love for humanity, as revealed in his sufferings and crucifixion (which is why red is the liturgical colour of the day). No Mass is celebrated, and the mid-afternoon liturgy is very stark and austere, focussing on listening to Old Testament readings, the story of Jesus’ Passion, and on venerating the cross as the sign of Jesus’ love for us. It includes solemn prayers for our world and its religious and political leaders, for Christians, Jews, and those of other faiths, for those who do not believe in God—and this year, an extraordinary prayer will be added, asking God’s help in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Biblical readings are emotionally powerful and heart-wrenching (although we need to recall that, in John’s Gospel, the term “the Jews” is generally used to mean “Jesus’ opponents,” rather than the Jewish people as a whole). In Mark 8:34, Jesus says that, to be his followers, we must deny ourselves, take up our own crosses and follow behind him.

(Go to the Board’s Twitter Feed to pray the Stations of the Cross with Ms Rerccich, Chaplain at STA. or find this at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cNsftnRXr_s&t=11s )
Every one of us has experienced the cross in our own lives: in loneliness, discouragement, sickness, suffering, failure, persecution, loss and death. But for people of faith, knowing that we are following in Jesus’ footsteps gives us reassurance and comfort, strength and hope—because we know what that path ultimately leads us. Good Friday can seem like a day of defeat and misfortune, and it is certainly paradoxical and contrary to our expectations: the one who truly is greatest and most powerful (Jesus) seems to be weakest, most vulnerable and most humiliated … he dies the ignominious death of a criminal and a social outcast, and is buried in a borrowed tomb thanks to the generosity of a friend. But because we know that this is not the end of the story, we see the cross as a sign of victory and forgiveness, rather than of cruel death, torture and despair. Ancient Christian writers compared the “tree” of the cross with the tree in the Garden of Eden, whose fruit Adam and Eve ate, with such disastrous results. Just as one tree resulted in death and a ruptured relationship, so now this second tree has brought about reconciliation and new life. The image of the cross as the Tree of Life captures the paradoxical blessings of this day.

Holy Saturday - Readings: [http://usccb.org/bible/readings/041120.cfm](http://usccb.org/bible/readings/041120.cfm)

**Gospel: Matthew 28:1-10**

Holy Saturday is the one day when the Church holds no liturgies at all. The church building sits empty and undecorated. We “press pause,” and wait at Jesus’ tomb, in sorrow and expectation … a day of silence and meditation, a day “in between” … After sunset, however, the Easter Vigil begins, with the kindling of a new fire, and the lighting of the massive Easter candle, symbolizing the light of the Risen Christ piercing and conquering the darkness of death and sin. The ancient Easter proclamation, called the Exsultet, captures the overpowering joy Christians feel as we celebrate Jesus’ Resurrection: O truly blessed night, worthy alone to know the time and hour when Christ rose from the underworld! … The sanctifying power of this night dispels wickedness, washes faults away, restores innocence to the fallen, and joy to mourners, drives out hatred, fosters concord, and brings down the mighty … O truly blessed night, when things of heaven are wed to those of earth, and the divine to the human! In its full form, the Vigil liturgy leads us through nine Biblical readings, which together tell the story of salvation history through both the Old and New Testaments. Just before the Gospel, we hear again the triumphant “Alleluia” (which has not been sung for the 40 days of Lent), with new freshness and power. Normally, adults who had been preparing for baptism or reception into the Church would celebrate those sacraments at the Vigil—but unfortunately that cannot happen this year, and those ceremonies will need to be deferred. With the Easter Vigil, Easter has officially arrived, and we begin a season of joyful celebrations that will spill over into the next 50 days.

**An Easter Prayer:**

Alleluia! Jesus is risen! He is risen indeed! May this declaration resound not only within these walls but touch the lives of all we meet, and forever be the truth of which we speak. Amen! (From an Anglican prayer for Easter)

There are a number of resources for watching and participating at [https://formed.org/holyweek](https://formed.org/holyweek)
The Saint for Today ST. DIONYSIUS, BISHOP OF CORINTH
Endowed with an admirable knowledge of the Word of God and great eloquence, he became bishop of his city, Corinth. He believed in the primacy of the Church of Rome although in the 2nd century it was not yet established, as evidenced by eight of his letters addressed to as many local churches. Dionysius is only known to us through the writings of the historian, Eusebius. Eusebius knew a collection of seven of the Catholic Letters to the Churches of Dionysius, together with a letter to him from Pinytus, Bishop of Knossus, and a private letter of spiritual advice to a lady named Chrysophora. He is believed to have died on April 8, 171 CE.

What makes this night different from all other nights?

Tonight, our Jewish friends and neighbours celebrate the first evening of Passover and we wish them “Good Pesach”! As this is very much a time for family and group celebrations, they are just as affected as we are in being unable to gather in prayer, memory and celebration. A Rabbi friend drew to my attention that for Orthodox Jews, this isolation is more difficult than for us as they cannot use electronics on the Sabbath and so are unable even to use an app to gather in prayer. As the Seder ends with the toast, “Next year in Jerusalem”, may we pray that they, like we, will be able to celebrate more fully next year.

If you are interested in learning more about the Haggadah – or “script” of a Passover meal, here is a site to check. You may be surprised at some familiar parts…

Jewish festivals always begin at sundown the day before, and it may be of interest that Christians define the day the same way: it begins and sundown and ends at the same time the next day. The Eve before a special feast – like Easter Eve, Christmas Eve, the Eve of All Hallows otherwise known as Hallowe’en – all have their place in our cycle of prayer. That is why a Saturday evening Mass can fulfill Sunday’s obligation (although, strictly speaking, it should be after sundown!) This follows from the Genesis reading which is the first of our readings at the Easter Vigil: “And there was evening and there was morning, the ----- day.”

And God saw that it was good…

If you have time to sit with the seven readings of the Easter Vigil Mass, you will see how this Divine Liturgy tells the whole of our salvation history from the Creation to Jesus. That is why it is so unfortunate that, in our rushed lives, there are often a reduced number of these readings proclaimed in our parish celebrations of this liturgy in the interests of people’s time and patience.

You can find them all at https://catholicreadings.org/holy-saturday-night-easter-vigil-readings/
A Prayer for this time from the US Bishops

For all who have contracted coronavirus,
   We pray for care and healing.

For those who are particularly vulnerable,
   We pray for safety and protection.

For all who experience fear or anxiety,
   We pray for peace of mind and spirit.

For affected families who are facing difficult decisions between food on the table or public safety,
   We pray for policies that recognize their plight.

For those who do not have adequate health insurance,
   We pray that no family will face financial burdens alone.

For those who are afraid to access care due to immigration status,
   We pray for recognition of the God-given dignity of all.

For our brothers and sisters around the world,
   We pray for shared solidarity.

For public officials and decision-makers,
   We pray for wisdom and guidance.

Father, during this time may your Church be a sign of hope, comfort and love to all.
   Grant peace.
   Grant comfort.
   Grant healing.

Amen.

GOOD FRIDAY SAMPLE INTERCESSIONS FOR THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

On Good Friday, the Liturgy of the Word of the Celebration of the Passion of the Lord concludes with the Solemn Intercessions, an ancient part of this liturgy in the Roman Rite. Over a series of ten petitions – each made up of an introduction, an invitation to silent prayer (sometimes accompanied by kneeling), and a concluding prayer – the People of God pray for the Church and its leaders and ministers, catechumens entering the Church, Christian unity, the Jewish people, those who do not believe in Jesus Christ and/or God, public officials, and people in any tribulation.

In addition to these petitions, "[i]n a situation of grave public need, the Diocesan Bishop may permit or order the addition of a special intention" (Roman Missal, Friday of the Passion of the
Lord, no. 13). The ongoing scourge of the 2019-2020 coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic presents such a grave public need. To that end, the USCCB Secretariat of Divine Worship prepared a sample text for bishops to use or adapt, and the Holy See's Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments subsequently offered its own sample petition.

Nevertheless, the decision of whether to insert a special intention and the composition of its text remains the purview of the Diocesan Bishop. During livestreamed liturgies on Good Friday, April 10, 2020, members of the faithful throughout the United States may hear, in varying words, an extra petition in the Solemn Intercessions asking Almighty God to be with his people during this time of pandemic, to give comfort to patients and caregivers, and eternal rest to the deceased.

The proposed sample texts below could be used or adapted for private or family prayer. Many dioceses have also issued one or more special prayers during the pandemic.

**Sample Intercessions for the COVID-19 Pandemic**

**From the Holy See**

IX b. For the afflicted in time of pandemic

Let us pray also for all those who suffer the consequences of the current pandemic, that God the Father may grant health to the sick, strength to those who care for them, comfort to families and salvation to all the victims who have died.

Prayer in silence. Then the Priest says:

Almighty ever-living God, only support of our human weakness, look with compassion upon the sorrowful condition of your children who suffer because of this pandemic; relieve the pain of the sick, give strength to those who care for them, welcome into your peace those who have died and, throughout this time of tribulation, grant that we may all find comfort in your merciful love. Through Christ our Lord.
R. Amen.

**From the USCCB**

*If the Diocesan Bishop has ordered the use of the exact text as proposed by the USCCB, a musical setting is available for clergy.*
XI. For an end to the pandemic

Let us pray, dearly beloved, for a swift end to the coronavirus pandemic that afflicts our world, that our God and Father will heal the sick, strengthen those who care for them, and help us all to persevere in faith.

Prayer in silence. Then the Priest says:

Almighty and merciful God, source of all life, health and healing, look with compassion on our world, brought low by disease; protect us in the midst of the grave challenges that assail us and in your fatherly providence grant recovery to the stricken, strength to those who care for them, and success to those working to eradicate this scourge. Through Christ our Lord. R. Amen.


A Prayer for Hope from Rabbi Naomi Levy

We are frightened, God, Worried for our loved ones, Worried for our world. Helpless and confused, We turn to You Seeking comfort, faith and hope. Teach us God, to turn our panic into patience, And our fear into acts of kindness and support. Our strong must watch out for our weak, Our young must take care of our old. Help each one of us to do our part to halt the spread of this virus Send strength and courage to the doctors and nurses In the frontlines of this battle, Fortify them with the full force of their healing powers. Send wisdom and insight to the scientists Working day and night across the world to discover healing treatments. Bless their efforts, God.
Fill our leaders with the wisdom and the courage
To choose wisely and act quickly.
Help us, God, to see that we are one world,
One people
Who will rise above this pandemic together.
Send us health God,
Watch over us,
Grace us with Your love,
Bless us with Your healing light.
Hear us God,
Heal us God,
Amen.

May you and those dear to you be sustained by your faith as we face this together,

Gillian