

The Triduum: Understanding the Liturgy Wednesday, March 16, 2005 7:00 p.m.

Celebrating vs. Reenacting; Anamnesis; Royal Entrance (Palm Sunday); The Way Jesus Interprets His Life

Father Paul:

The purpose of tonight's gathering is to prayerfully prepare ourselves for the celebration of the Triduum. This evening is intended to be **prayerful** itself; it is also meant to be **informative**. It is also meant to be perhaps **instructive** in the sense of helping us really prepare for the liturgy.

First of all, when we talk about liturgy, what do we mean? "**Liturgy**" literally means "**the work of the people**"—the work of the people. So when we come to gather for liturgy we do not come passively to observe, but we come to work in the original meaning of *opus Dei*—having nothing to do with the modern group by that name—but ***opus Dei, the work of God***. What is the work of God? It is related to the word "celebrate." Celebrate has nothing to do with what we do at birthday parties. Birthday parties are not celebrations—not in the biblical sense, not in the liturgical sense. To understand "celebrate" in the liturgical sense, it is better to think of the term "a celebrated attorney." That means a well-known attorney. **To celebrate liturgically means to make known the mysteries of God in Christ**. So liturgy is a celebration, and celebration is itself a form of evangelization. It is a form of making known what God has done. So we need to think about that.

Now when the Christian community gathers, it gathers with this awareness that the life of the community itself and the lives of the individuals in the community have been changed by God. We are called to a new life, and **our identity has been changed**. So we gather reflecting on: **who are we now in God**, and how is God continuing the work that

he began in Christ. Really didn't begin in Christ, but brought to a culmination in Christ. The assumption of the Bible—we believe in the Bible—the idea is that the **Bible reveals and discloses the ways of God in such a way that we can discover how God will work in our lives.** Why? God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. What God has done, he does and shall do. So we keep that in mind as we gather to celebrate the mysteries revealed in Christ.

Sometimes people get the idea that when we gather for liturgy, especially for Holy Week, we are reenacting; and some of the ways we behave look like a reenactment, but that is not the point. It is rather to remember, and when we remember, **we remember in a way that changes us, that influences us.** There is a Greek word *anamnesis*. This forms the very basis of our Eucharistic liturgy. It means remembering. The word is sometimes translated remembrance, but the term is also used in law, where it used to mean the deposition of a witness. The formal deposition of a witness was called “**anamnesis.**” **So it means a formal declaration of what happened from the viewpoint of that witness.**

The Church, in its beginnings, is a witness to the work of God. When the Church gathers to celebrate, it is witnessing to what it knows. The most ancient form of anamnesis is from St. Paul's Letter, 1 Corinthians. We read it on Holy Thursday evening. “On the night before he died, Jesus took bread.” This is a way of remembering what Jesus did. The presider is like a court reporter repeating word for word what the witness says, although word for word now is changed because of translations, but the idea for idea, concept for concept, what the witness says—**the witness being the Church.**

Now everything in the whole liturgy points to everything else, so we are celebrating the whole of the death and resurrection of Christ at every moment. It

isn't as if we gather on Holy Thursday and now Jesus hasn't died yet, so we are going to accompany him emotionally and sentimentally through the agony; that's what we are doing now—No! No, we are always aware of the totality. We celebrate the Mass so that **even on Holy Thursday we are already celebrating the resurrection of Christ.** We don't receive the body of Christ before he died. We don't receive the dead body of Christ. **We receive from the very beginning the living body of Christ.**

The role of Jesus as Messiah is, of course, the highlight of the whole week. His role of Messiah is a role that he claimed and confirmed throughout his ministry, but in such a way that he **offended** one of the principle centers of authority within Judaism, which was the **Temple priesthood.** Before I go into this I am going to mention that he also offended the other center of authority in Judaism, which was the **rabbinic teachers.** So he offended both of them.

I will talk about the rabbis first. He said, "Call no man rabbi." He wasn't talking about titles. **He was really disowning a whole way in which a people were being taught to slavishly follow rules.** It's very important we remember this because we are constantly being tempted to do the same thing: to develop all kinds of new rules, new policies, new procedures, that we will all follow, and that will be very nice and orderly. That is not Christ's way. Principally, he objected to the idea of the oral *Torah*. The oral *Torah* is this idea that God revealed to Moses an enormous body of information, a small bit of which became written down in what the Jews call the *Tanak*. We call it the "Old Testament." Some people today call it the "Hebrew Scriptures," but the Jews call it *Tanak*.

Now in the *Tanak* there are six hundred thirty-six laws. These are found in the Books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy is repetition; that's why

it's deutero in there. *Devteros* is a Greek word for second. It's the second Law, the second repetition. **Jesus never objects to the written Law**, but he says that the written Law can be summarized in two very simple ways. First of all, "Love God with your whole heart, mind, and soul." That's Deuteronomy, Chapter 6. Secondly, "Love your neighbor as yourself." That's Leviticus, Chapter 19. This was a radical departure from rabbinic teaching. There were approximately ten thousand different stipulations in the oral tradition—six hundred written down.

For the rabbis, they were all important. Every one of them was important. You had to follow every single one of them, or you weren't following the whole thing at all! So this is therefore a great burden. You remember Christ saying, "My yoke is easy, my burden light." **He does not intend to burden people with law.** Rather, he intends to enlighten people with law, and he wants to **focus on the Lawgiver and a personal relationship to the Lawgiver.** This is something he accentuates time and time again.

Secondly, and this is even more radical, he dismisses the oral tradition all together as a mere human tradition. He says, "You nullify the law of God, and replace it with a mere human tradition." Now that mere human tradition was something that many people faithfully and sincerely believed in, so we mustn't become judgmental and look down on the Jewish people who really believed in this, because in all sincerity many did, and many still do. But Jesus did not—a fact of life! **What are we going to do about people who sincerely believe things we don't sincerely believe?** We have to acknowledge this.

Part of what Jesus tried to teach people was **you have to feel your way to the reality of God.** Although he did become very angry when people turned their backs on the reality of God shining through, the healing of someone born blind, for example, and

when they looked at that and didn't find that godly, that was something that made Jesus angry. But that doesn't mean that they weren't sincere in their beliefs. They were sincere in their beliefs. So therefore **there was a clash here, a very deep and powerful clash of faiths.**

Judaism is not a single faith. It's a religious tradition that contains **many different faiths** in it, Jesus being one of them, **Christianity being one of them.** We are really Jewish. Our faith is a Jewish faith, just different from rabbinic faith; but the rabbis did not speak for everyone anyway, maybe about a third of the peoples. We have to also keep in mind that by the time of Constantine five million out of the six million Jews who lived at the time of Christ had converted to Christianity or simply no longer practiced Judaism. This mass exodus from the rabbinic style of life was something that had already begun, not necessarily at the time of Christ, but at the time the New Testament was being written; and some of the animosity created on both sides is reflected in our New Testament, in our gospels. So we have to keep that in mind as we read them, not to discount it, but to be aware of it. This discounting, this ignoring, of the oral tradition was a powerful issue between Jesus and the Pharisees. If you read the gospel you see that constantly there are these disputes, these arguments, these conflicts, between Jesus and the Pharisees. However, that is not the reason Jesus was crucified. **Jesus was not crucified because of his argument with the Pharisees.** He was crucified for a different reason. I want to bring up the first in order to accentuate the second.

The second **great conflict** Jesus had with the authorities in his own religion was with the **Sadducees, who were the Temple priests.** The Temple was the center of cultic life at the time of Christ, and had become so in a period of several hundred years before him.

It had not always been that way, but it was at that time. In the Temple there were constant **sacrifices**. There were stockyards—stockyards full of animals ready to be sacrificed. Jesus himself seemed to have a very low opinion of this use of the Temple. You will recall at one point he took a whip and sent away the moneychangers. They were not selling cookies nor were they having a bake sale. That’s not what he was worried about. He was attacking the very idea of selling animals for sacrifice and the way in which it was done, which, incidentally, put the poor at a great disadvantage because they had to change their Roman coin into shekels, and so on. So it was a profit thing for priests. But that was not the worst thing.

There is also a power thing. **The Temple had become a center of power and influence in Israel, and the Sanhedrin wanted a restoration of the political control they had called “hegemony” over the whole land of Palestine.** So they promoted the idea of a war, a holy war, a jihad, against the infidel, namely, the Romans. That was the real crux of Jesus’ conflict that led to his own crucifixion, because while he had affirmed in so many ways his messianic role or his messianic appointment and his various signs, and the evangelists do a very fine job of showing precisely how messianic he really was, nonetheless, **he rejected this final messianic role: leading the revolt against Rome.** That’s why we begin Holy Week with the procession that recalls his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. We have to think of triumphal and **triumphalism as part of the whole story.** **He accepted his messianic role, but he did not accept this particular detail.** But the mere fact that it was part of the whole was, you might say, in the very beginning a problem.

At that time the ideas of, you might say, the theology or the religious thinking of people had come to the point of believing—although it never said in the Bible, but they believed it—that the **Messiah would come during Passover**. Now we are talking about the year Jesus died; we are talking about the Passover that year, and Jesus' entry into Jerusalem precisely before Passover. So this is keying in the whole issue of now what? What is God going to do? What is Jesus going to do? For the Sanhedrin the issue had to be, well, he better start fulfilling his proper role.

Now he enters on a donkey. Now people think lowly of donkeys, especially Republicans. But donkeys are not to be thought lowly. Donkeys in the Bible are royal creatures, and you would know this if you have ever tried to ride a horse up to Jerusalem. You would end up in a ravine because horses are not sure-footed enough, anymore than you would take a horse down into the Grand Canyon. You take a donkey or a mule. Well, they used donkeys. So this was a royal passage. Partly Jesus had to let—now this is me speaking—I think Jesus partly had to let that **royal affirmation come his way for this whole matter to build into the head that it did**.

Now when **Jesus brought his disciples together to eat the Passover**—and we have to say we are not absolutely sure that the so-called “Last Supper” was really a Passover. Mark says it was. John doesn't say it was, in fact, implies it wasn't. Those are the two sources we have, so we don't know which is right. Now Matthew and Luke simply follow Mark, but that doesn't make Mark more right because three of them agree, because Luke wouldn't have a clue—he was not even Jewish. Matthew just follows Mark, so we don't know whether this was or not, but, in general, most people probably think it was a Passover. So Jesus gathers his fellows, his people, and we don't know who

is there either. We have allowed a lot of this to be interpreted for us by artists, so you see the Last Supper and there are twelve men there. Oh, well, that was it. Mary wasn't there; no women were there—no disciples—we don't know that. We don't know who was there except those who are named. Even that doesn't fit because Mark and the synoptic gospels don't exactly agree with John, but that's another matter—it doesn't matter—it's just a detail.

When Jesus gathers, whether or not it was the Passover meal, the most important thing is he **takes a bread**, a piece of matzoth, and he breaks it and he says, “This is my body that is broken, that is given up, for you.” Now you have to think about that for a while, and I don't know that the disciples had a clue what he was doing—I don't know that they had a clue what he was doing! The clue was furthered when he **took the blessing cup**—if it was a Passover, this would be a Kiddush cup—and he said, “This is the blood of the new and everlasting covenant. It will be poured out so sins may be forgiven.” **Now what is he saying?** Well, first and foremost, he is saying **that he is going to die, and his death is not a tragedy**. He is saying his death is something he is **voluntarily offering up**. We have to keep in mind there is no such idea in Judaism. That is not a sacrifice in Judaism. **He is totally reinterpreting the whole idea of what a sacrifice is.**

First of all, what is a sacrifice? A sacrifice is a—well, the word itself means “holy thing”; it doesn't help us too much. **The sacrifice is an act of praise, thanksgiving and consecration by which food is eaten in communion with God in gratitude and in petition.** But the communion is not central. There were even holocausts where there was nothing ever eaten, but the whole thing was burned up. The real essential issue in sacrifice is that **God is the author of all life, and so when an animal is killed, the life**

goes back to God because all life is breath, breath of God, so it goes back to God. Upon this breath within the animal is placed the petitions and the gratitude of the community. That's an original idea. That was basic to sacrifice.

However, as time went on **the idea of sacrifice changed**, and the prophets didn't like it. What happened was the symbolism, the transparency of the symbolism—that here we are offering our gratitude to God and asking for more of what we need, that it will continue, that the cycle of life will continue, that God will so deem us worthy to receive more blessings, that we will continue to be sustained in our lives—moved from that point to the idea that **God actually wants our things! Now the prophets ridiculed this**. The prophet speaks for God saying, “You think I want the blood of goats? You think I drink this stuff? And if I were hungry, do you think I would tell you? Don't you understand I already own everything? You are not giving me anything I don't already have.” So **the transparency of the symbolism was lost**.

The **materialist principle of “if one is good, two is better”** was introduced, and we have these huge, exorbitant sacrifices—stockyards full of meat being slaughtered. This is missing the point.

Furthermore, during the time of the Babylonian exile and afterwards, **the idea of ritual substitution, penal substitution**, was introduced. That means instead of punishing people, which the Law required—if Alice kills her husband, well, we have to kill Alice. That's the Law. Well, now we couldn't do that anymore because it's not our law anymore. We are subject to Babylon or we are subject to Assyria or we are subject to Persia or we are subject to Rome or some other country, some other power. We can't do

that anymore, so we will **substitute some animal**. Then this idea of penal substitution was introduced.

Well, those ideas go with this oral tradition and with all kinds of things that developed later, but they weren't part of Jesus' thinking. **Unfortunately, they became part of Christian thinking, and some people believe Jesus was substituting himself for sinners in general, so that now God was pleased with his death because his death somehow quelled God's anger or wrath**, which is mentioned in the Old Testament quite often—God's wrath at injustice. But that's not a correct interpretation. **What Jesus is saying is, "I am going to God where I can intercede better for you than I can here.** "So," he says, "it's better for you that I go. You are crying and weeping and mourning, but it's better for you that I go." That's the idea. He is now going to be the victim who goes to God himself. He is not going to use an intermediary, some animal, but he is going himself.

Later on, the **Letter to the Hebrews will say, not only is he the victim, but he is the priest**, which fits in perfectly with that idea, because the priest, the high priest anyway, was the one who interceded at the mercy seat in the Temple. **Now Jesus is going to go to the throne in heaven**, as the Letter to the Hebrews explains. That's the anamnesis. That's what he is trying to say. He is interpreting his death. It's nothing to cry about. It is not my defeat, but you don't understand what a real victory is. This is actually my victory. And John makes it so clear that **Jesus actually reigns on the cross**, a total turning around of what we normally think is true.

Bob Valle:

Holy Thursday: We enter the church space. Did you ever wonder why we don't sing "Lord at that first Eucharist before you died"? Why isn't that the first thing that comes out of our mouth on Holy Thursday? Why on Good Friday is the first thing out of our mouth not "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" Why is it that these days that we come thinking in our minds of specific events, the Church turns it around and tells us **to look at the whole thing, to look at the entire mystery that's going on?**

The Opening Antiphon, which is another word for Opening Song, for Holy Thursday gives us the theme for the whole three days. It doesn't give us the idea of Holy Thursday. It gives us the theme of what these whole three days are. **They are not three separate celebrations.** When we come in on Holy Thursday we begin something that will not end until Holy Saturday night at the end of the Easter Vigil. You will notice at the end of Holy Thursday, **you are not dismissed.** At the end of Good Friday, we are not dismissed. If you come for Morning Prayer on any one of those days, Morning Prayer on Good Friday or Holy Saturday, if you come to Night Prayer, you are not dismissed: "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Thanks be to God." That doesn't happen. **We are at one prayer from the beginning of Holy Thursday until the end.** The Opening Antiphon for Holy Thursday, which is something that we sing here at St. Joseph's, gives us our theme for the whole time. "We should glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, for he is our salvation, our life and resurrection; through him we are saved and made free." When we look at the liturgy of Holy Thursday, we have to look at it through that lens, through the totality of that lens. When we go to Good Friday, as Father Paul said, we don't come thinking, oh, this is the day we celebrate Jesus is dead. No! We glory in

the cross for the resurrection. The hope of Easter is already breaking through on Good Friday. It is already breaking through on Holy Thursday as well.

So I am a musician, right? So we cannot get away without singing because part of our time of doing this together is that when we come to those liturgies during the Triduum they happen very quickly, and they are **things that we only do once a year!** We wash feet once a year. We venerate the cross once a year. We hear those particular Scripture stories once a year, so they can come and leave us so quickly. Part of tonight is maybe a way of opening us up prior to that celebration, so that when we come back on Holy Thursday, ah, we have heard some of this already, and we are able to treasure them and ponder them in our heart as Mary did. We always think of Mary remembering things. So the first song we are going to sing is *Glory in the Cross*, which you hear on Holy Thursday for the opening. I will sing it the first time, and then you will repeat it. The verse that will be sung in between talks about Christ being raised on the tree, as Father Paul was mentioning.

Father Paul:

One of the unique rituals we perform on **Holy Thursday is the Washing of the Feet**, which is called the *Mandatum*, which means the mandate, and yet, paradoxically, it's not mandated. It's optional. I don't know why. It's a profound ritual if we understand it. First of all, it may be shocking to people to realize what the world was like at the time of Christ. It was made up of **freeborn and slave**. Approximately half the population was slave population. Not only that, but some people who were freeborn became like slaves through various ways. For example, if you became a debtor, you could become for all

intents and purposes a slave of the person you owed a debt to until you worked off the debt, which might be never, depending how big it was. Also **disciples who followed a master, a man of wisdom, were for all intents and purposes slaves of that master.** They did his laundry; they did his cooking; they took care of all his personal needs; they waited on him, and on and on. This is the way it was, and it still is this way among certain groups in Central Asia where there are still so-called “schools of wisdom.” The masters are the lords.

Now **Jesus in many ways was a master.** He surely had disciples. We don’t really know too much about what the day-to-day routine was. But here is one shocking thing: Jesus never said that people who had slaves should set them free. He did speak of freeing prisoners, but he never spoke of freeing slaves. That’s just the way it was. Some people today regard this as a great moral flaw in Christ and in the Church that it never saw this. But what is even more remarkable to me, to my thinking is, **not only did Jesus not say free the slaves, he became one himself! That’s how he interpreted his life, and that’s what he shows in the washing of the feet.** He comes as the master. He invites his friends to table, and then he turns around and becomes their slave. Now this is turning social values upside down. This is a master who is deciding not to rule. Peter was upset. I don’t blame him. “No, you are not going to touch my feet!” Well, it wasn’t his feet he was worried about! **It was the whole relationship that was being put upside down!**

He said to his disciples during this meal: “I don’t call you servants any longer”—slaves—*douloi*, in Greek. “I don’t call you that anymore. Now I am going to call you friends.” This is really disconcerting **if your role is to be a slave and now you are going to be a friend, what does that entail?** St. Thomas Aquinas reflects on this. He says,

“The very nature of friendship is what’s mine is yours, and what’s yours is mine.” That’s what he is saying to his disciples—**“What’s yours is mine, and what’s mine is yours.”** Extraordinary! It’s really adoption. **It’s a legal adoption in which everyone becomes the heir.** Now there was very commonly in the ancient world a legal adoption where a slave was made an heir, but now they are all being made heirs.

At the same time he is saying, **“But now this is the way I want you to live, as a slave to one another.”** I think we should recognize that means that we cannot regard service as optional. “Service” is a better word than good works. Good works might include service; it might not. Service is not optional. **We need to serve, meaning to love people. What does it mean to serve?** That’s something we have to think about. What does it mean to serve? **It doesn’t mean to do things for people, necessarily. It may mean to speak to them** or to call them forth or to reveal to them their actual intrinsic goodness, leadership qualities, whatever. But it’s surely an active role, and it’s an active role that is totally self-effacing. **It’s an active role that is self-effacing and one of great power.** Jesus always acted with great power, and part of his power was the fact that he walked on the earth. I will talk a little bit about that when we talk about the crucifixion, but this is already, as it were, being disclosed in the washing of the feet. So we need to consider as we go through this ritual, now, **how is God washing our feet and how are we washing one another’s? Again, let us make the ritual transparent.** We will have some moments of quiet.

Bob Valle:

The Triduum is a time we do more than just stay in our pews. There is so much ritual action that happens during all of Holy Week. It's the best part of being director of liturgy at a parish to figure out how you can make an assembly come alive with doing this. The one ritual that I always have [for] my soapbox follows the washing of the feet, which is the time—at no other time in the Church do we have this—where **the assembly is actually called forth by the Church to bring gifts for the poor.** Not take up a collection, but to actually bring gifts up for the poor. We are very fortunate here that in our parish we wash everyone's feet. As Father Paul said, that's an option actually in the service—hard to believe. Bringing up gifts for the poor is also a “may,” you can do it. Part of something that has always been in my mind about this is that **that part of ritual helps us to bring to life what we should be doing outside the walls of the church.** It is enacted and it teaches us and forms us into what we should be doing. So we wash feet as service, and then we actually bring forward gifts for the poor. We do physically—**we do for real in life—what we have just experienced as part of a ritual.**

There is a story about a very elderly nun who was very worried about a young sister, who is in the same convent, because she felt that she wasn't quite sure her vocation was secure. And she was worried with all sincerity. So she went to her spiritual director and said I am really worried about this younger sister, and I just want to pray that God will give her the strength to know that she is valued in this community and that she is of great importance here. Months go by. She prays and she prays and she prays, and the sister leaves. So she goes back to the spiritual director and explains all of this, “I have been praying and praying that God would strengthen this young sister's vocation.” And he asked her, “**Did you ever talk to her? Did you ever encourage her?** Did you ever

knock on her cell door to make her feel welcome, to let her know that her personhood was valued here?" It didn't occur to her that that was the case.

In our parish mission a few weeks ago with Brother Laughlin, he used the Prayer of St. Teresa. "Christ has no body now but yours, no hands no feet on earth but yours. Yours is the work to fill the earth with compassion." That song is a way of enfleshing what it is that we do on Holy Thursday from the washing of the feet to bringing forward the gifts for the poor. We are going to be using that as well on Holy Thursday as a second song for the foot washing. I would like you to hear that song because oftentimes we have heard that prayer as just a text and never something that can be sung. **Music is always a way to help us look beyond words and to find their deeper meaning for us.** So we have *Christ Has No Body Now But Yours.*

Father Paul:

As we continue on the evening of Thursday we do not, again, depart from the liturgy, but we take the liturgy home with us this evening to contemplate. **The real purpose of Eucharist is to give us the power to contemplate, to be one with, the presence of God wherever we are.** The Church urges us to be quietly prayerful during the next period from Thursday evening through Friday through Saturday, and wherever possible to practice the Paschal fast, which does not mean not eating anything, but eating as little as possible to keep that spirit of prayer at work. So it's prayer and fasting and almsgiving, which are the works really of penance and the works of our Lent, and they are all coming to a culmination. The almsgiving brought up in the Thursday liturgy, the fasting and prayer continued beyond.

Now we come to **Good Friday** and the afternoon Celebration of the Passion and Death. So we begin now with *Crux Fidelis*.

As we gather on Friday I want to distinguish between what we do and perhaps seeing the movie *The Passion of the Christ*. People went to that. Some liked it; some didn't. When we go to a movie, no matter who makes it, we are actually entering into the interpretation of the author, whoever it is. When we see the Stations of the Cross acted out, we are entering into the interpretation of those people who are doing it. It is not necessarily wrong, but it is putting us at a distance. That's not **the role of liturgy. It's to enter into. You become the artist, and you try to understand Christ, not what happened to him.** I mean the very nature of the movie was we saw a lot about Christ and we saw a lot about the people around him, but we didn't get much about what was going on inside of him, but that's what liturgy is supposed to lead us to, **into the heart of Christ as he lets go of his life in a complete surrender to the Father, who he believes can bring him greater life. So he dies in total trust,** not of course without great trial and tribulation. That's what we enter into.

Now one of the important things about Good Friday is the **General Intercessions**.
Bob, do you want to talk about that?

Bob Valle:

Just briefly! This is the one point in the Good Friday liturgy when we are doing **something we normally do on Sundays of the year, but that takes on a much more elaborate form.** So on Good Friday the General Intercessions number not five or six, but they number ten in total. They take on a much more elaborate display and function. Number one, we almost are in dialogue with one another. There is not just one person

announcing. We have the priest who gives us the introduction to the entire prayer, and then the deacon who announces each intention, and then we as individuals make the prayer our own, and then as a community we respond, however that may be. Some churches may do it silently, some in a spoken response; we do it in a sung response here. By its very nature it's **helping us to experience that we have been called to serve the world by placing the needs of the whole world before God.** So the same song that we were singing earlier about how Christ has no body but yours, we now exercise that function yet again within Good Friday liturgy.

Father Paul:

There is a quote from the Council of Trent. There is a question of the role of the Jews in the crucifixion of Christ. That became a great topic in the last year or so, especially after Mel Gibson's movie came out. The Council of Trent says, "Furthermore, men of all ranks and conditions were gathered together against the Lord and against his Christ. Gentiles and Jews were the advisors, the authors, and the ministers of his passion. Judas betrayed him. Peter denied him. All the rest deserted him. In this guilt are involved all those who fall frequently into sin, for as our sins consigned Christ the Lord to the death on the cross, most certainly those who wallow in sin and iniquity crucify to themselves again the Son of God, as far as in them lies and makes a mockery of him. This guilt seems more enormous in us than in the ancient Jews since according to the testimony of the same apostle, if they had known it, they would have never crucified the Lord of glory, while we, on the contrary professing to know him, yet denying him by our actions, seem in some sort to lay violent hands on him."

We are responsible for the death of Christ because we claim to believe in God and we claim to believe in Christ and yet we don't live according to our beliefs. So we are the ones really who crucified him. That's the idea: that we are being **brought to venerate the cross upon which we have placed Christ by our infidelity**, by our lack of humanity, by our lack of compassion, by our malice, by whatever, by our pettiness, and to try to understand how it is the way that we are that made it necessary for Jesus to die. We fashioned the world. **We have made the world what it is, and that resulted in Jesus being crucified.** Now in some other era it would have been a different kind of death, but it would have been a death anyway for anyone who comes in utter purity of heart and utter simplicity to serve the Father. Anyone who would do that would die in this world. And why? Because of us. **That's what we take to the cross.** The idea is we leave it there, because the whole idea is, of course, that God in his compassion doesn't stop loving us even when we kill him.

So we find a way of entering into that. That's our ritual. How we do it here: we have the cross—this cross—and we lay it down. We come up. Some people kiss it. It doesn't matter. One of the things is you don't want to just do something, but **you want to go up with some sense of what you are doing and what the cross is. It's the tree of life.**

Now in the Bible, in the Book of Genesis, there are two trees in the so-called garden of Eden. Now the garden of Eden is one of the most powerful metaphors ever developed. These two trees are very metaphorical trees. The tree of life—there is no such real tree, of course, but it represents something that in fact was not even unique to the Bible, the idea that in the middle of every tribal area there is the axis of the world. Most tribes in the history of the world had an actual area of land that was theirs, rather limited. Now the

North American Indians were kind of all over the place, and nomads sometimes were all over the place; but most tribes had at least a mythical idea of a place they belonged. Right in the middle was always the tree or the “axis,” sometimes called, where the **power from the higher world entered into their tribe, into their place, into their time.** They weren’t just rocks and fish and so on; they were something—they were a people.

This **tree of life is meant to be the source of true life for human beings,** for humanity, because **the biblical story is really about humanity.** That’s very important. Unlike other stories, which were about this group or that group, this biblical story is about human beings. Then later that was spoiled by certain people who said, “Oh, but we are the only human beings. The rest of the people aren’t really human.” We had that among the Jewish rabbis—some. We had that among Dominican theologians who said that Indians weren’t really human, and so on. So that is something that has been played over again too. But the **tree of life is the origin.**

Now the other tree is the **tree of the knowledge of good and evil,** again a metaphorical tree, not a wooden tree—a tree of knowledge. Now what does it mean to know good and evil? Not only that, **what does it mean to eat the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil?** It’s very important because **it’s the beginning of what’s wrong with humanity, according to the biblical story, because Eve doesn’t believe God really wants the best for her.** The serpent says, “Oh, don’t you know, God doesn’t want you to know what he knows, and he knows that if you eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you will be equal to him! He doesn’t want you to be. He wants you to be lower. So you go right ahead. You disbelieve him, and you just go and do whatever you want. You make it up: what is good, what is evil. It’s up to you now. You can do that.”

That's how the Book of Genesis understands original sin. **The first sin is a sin of distrust and it is a sin of pride—"I can do it!"**

The paradox is that God actually did want humanity to be equal. But they didn't understand what it meant to be equal. Jesus is the one who is equal to God—who is God! **Jesus introduces us to equality with God. But it's not the type of equality we wanted because it's not the kind of God we wanted.** That's why, going back again to Palm Sunday, the second reading, "Son though he was, Jesus did not deem equality with God something to be grasped, but took the form of a slave." Again, at the Last Supper he acted this out; he took the form of a slave. "He accepted death, even death on a cross." This is reversing Adam's decision in the garden. **This is the tree of life, the *axis mundi*, so to speak, but it's also the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. So the wood of the cross is very symbolic of these two trees in the stories of Genesis.** Song: *Tree of Life*

Bob Valle:

How many have never been to the Easter Vigil before? If you have never been to the Easter Vigil, the following little commentary will be very enlightening. If you have been to the Easter Vigil before, **the following commentary will be very enlightening.**

"To those who are not of the household of faith what we are about to do on this night must look very peculiar. We are about to stand in the dark, carry candles about, sing lengthy and sublime religious texts, read stories from the Bible. What does this all mean? What is going on here in this community?"

Tonight we are going to tell our name to ourselves by way of reminder to those who become part of us this night through Baptism and Confirmation and to those of the world

who will listen, who will take the time to hear what our name is. And our name is a very long one, one that has been growing since the creation of the world. Our name is a very long story of how we were made, of how God chose from among all peoples, of how God liberated us from bondage, of how God planted us in the promised land, of how in these last times God has given us the story with a new twist, given our name meaning in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Because we have been here for so long it takes a long time to tell who we are, to recount the story of our life as a people, and none of us would be here if we did not think that that name was worth telling and listening to.

Now the trick to this kind of name telling is to relax. You cannot be hasty in this time ahead of us. Haste will stop up your ears, finally, and then you will not hear this lovely language and our beautiful name. Relax and make yourself comfortable in the darkness, and don't even try to make sense of the name. Just hear it. Let it roll over you in waves of meanings. Tonight we are going to listen to a series of episodes, not write a theological treatise on the resurrection.

A practical word about relaxing: if you need to get up and move about, do so. If you need a breath of fresh air, go out to get it. We'll still be telling the story when you come back. Whatever you need to do to stay comfortable, do it. All of this will enable you to hear the lovely language in which we can really name ourselves as God himself has named us. 'Christian' is merely an inadequate abbreviation for what we are about to tell."

From Brian Helge in A Triduum Sourcebook pages 77-78, ed. Huck and Simcoe, 1983
Archdiocese of Chicago.

Father Paul:

The Vigil of Easter is the highpoint of the entire Church year in terms of its liturgy and self-understanding. It has evolved over the years, but it begins with the fundamental understanding of the gradual, dawning awareness that the early Church received that **Jesus was no longer in the tomb**, that he had been raised up. He was appearing to chosen ones. He was accompanying people on the road. **He was with them.** And this, of course, revolutionized their lives and really empowered them to spend the rest of their lives in service of this gospel. **The Church remembers this in a ritual way**—every time really we gather, but in a very specific way at the Vigil of Easter.

On this night we begin with a Liturgy of Light. There are four liturgies in the Vigil. The Liturgy of the Light is the first one. In the **Liturgy of Light** we celebrate in the proper sense—we make known—our understanding of Christ. The Vigil itself begins after nightfall, and the darkness symbolizes the world without Christ, the world before Christ. **We light a bonfire, and that light represents the power of God beginning something new.**

Now it's very informative to read about modern physics. Modern physics talks about thirteen, fourteen billion years ago the big bang was this enormous eruption out of nothing; I mean, that's what they say, "out of no space, out of no place." It was the creation of space and the creation of time, and it was a ball of fire. It is the cooling of that stuff that began the matter all around us. **The Easter fire represents the rebirth of hope in a world that has grown cold through entropy of a spiritual, moral nature.** Entropy means the loss of energy. Well, the energy of life is lost as people's hearts grow cold, as determination to live a good life dissipates, wears away, as people lose direction, lose guidance, lose vision, and so on.

Now **Christ is the restoration of vision and hope and guidance, but more, he is the first fruits of a new creation.** So the **fire** is the beginning of our ritual explosion: realization that **God has now done something totally new.** In the resurrection of Christ he has confirmed the life of Christ, which was already turning everything we know upside down through the washing of the feet, turning social values upside down; through the death on the cross, turning the whole idea of what it means to be godly upside down; through the sharing in the meal, interpreting the whole idea of worship and sacrifice in a totally different way, in a new way, in a way of total self-giving and self-donation. And all of this is **reinterpreting the role of the Messiah and God's salvific desire for his people and the whole world.** So all of this is all bound up in the Easter fire that now we light.

We carry the fire on a candle representing, again, the presence of Christ in our midst and his continuing glory. We bring that fire into the Church. The deacon sings "Light of Christ." When we get to this back part we share that light with little tapers, and the whole idea is that **through us now this light will spread**—and only through us. It won't spread in any other way. God is not going to send lightning or angels, but rather you. You are the ones God is going to send to bring this light into the world of darkness, because the darkness is still present in this sense that the darkness will reign wherever there is no light. We know that what Christ came to bring is not in every heart yet. We are sent to bring that light to the hearts of others and to ourselves as well. So that is the Liturgy of the Light and there is a beautiful hymn that is sung during this period when we hold the tapers.

The second part is **Liturgy of the Word**; that's the second liturgy. And this is a long reading—beautiful readings that more or less capsulize the history of salvation.

Thirdly, we come to the **Liturgy of Baptism**. Now originally I was going to walk us all back to the baptistery, but I don't think that's necessary. You have seen the baptistery. The Liturgy of Baptism is essential to the Easter Vigil even though, sadly, there are some years when there is no one to baptize. The idea is that on this day **when we celebrate in a most particular way the resurrection of Christ, that is the day that is preeminently suitable to baptize**, because what is Baptism? So that's the question: What is Baptism? When we go back to the origin of the Easter Vigil it was a period when the main thing was Baptism, because in Rome at the time of Leo I, fifth century, no adult was ever baptized except on the Vigil. It just wasn't done [except in danger of death].

Now on a typical Easter Vigil, the pope as **bishop of Rome would baptize three thousand believers**—three thousand—in one night! This Vigil took much more than two hours. Ours we say, “Oh, it takes two hours”; yeah, it's not that long! This one took longer than two hours. It took place in two places. People gathered in the church with lanterns and candles in order to read, and they would just read and read and read for hours while they waited in vigil. That was the vigil. They waited and waited and waited for the baptisms to get over, which were somewhere else because in Roman churches the baptistery was a separate building. The baptisms went on for some time. They were private affairs in this sense: they weren't very private, but they weren't for spectators. Men were baptized in the nude; women baptized with just a little veil. There were deaconesses to anoint the women. There were deacons to anoint the men. The bishop stood in the font.

At that time, and in most Mediterranean countries, the **baptism font was low**, not like this, which is high, but low, and the point of the Baptism was **entering into it and walking across it**. So you have to see that the actual action itself was saying something about how the Church understood Baptism. **It understood Baptism as the new Exodus**. They saw Jesus' death as an exodus from the world of darkness and the world of self-centeredness and the world of self-preservation and the world dictated to by physical conditions and bound by the fear of death and dominated by all kinds of anxieties—they saw Jesus as leading them out of this world in a new Exodus. They would read, of course, about the Exodus of ancient times because this is the new Exodus, only it's not taking place from a geographical place to another geographical place, but from a psychological place to another psychological place, that is, the life dominated by darkness versus the life now enlightened by Christ. So that's the meaning of the font itself. The font is the Red Sea or the Sea of Reeds, through which the transition is made.

Now the baptized person would crouch down a little bit, and then the bishop would pick up water and pour it over the head in a threefold gesture—"In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Now this is no longer true Baptism in the sense of the word. Baptizo means "**I dunk**." Early on before that time it was dunking, and it was often done in rivers. It was associated with death, I mean, if you hold someone's head under the water too long, they die, so **it's a ritual dying**. In St. Paul's day they used sarcophagi, which are actually places where coffins were placed in the earth. They filled them with water to emphasize dying and rising. By the time that the liturgy developed in a more elaborate way, which is what we are heirs to, it had already moved to this idea of Exodus.

Later on by the ninth century, there is a baptistery in Trier, and it's just this remarkable, huge bathtub! By that time these Christians are barbarians, and they see **Baptism as a cleansing rite. Now these are all valid interpretations: dunking, dying, rising in ritual form, exiting the world of sin, and cleansing—all of them are valid.** The one that was captured in the original liturgy that we are celebrating was Exodus. So you see the reading of Exodus and Baptism is connected.

Now there are other rituals that surround Baptism, all of which speak of its meaning. If you go to Scripture, it is such a rich sacrament that there are so many different ways of speaking: rebirth, for example, dying and rising, new life. One of the more prominent ways is “**putting on Christ.**” That's the meaning of Baptism: putting on Christ. What they did in the ancient ritual at the time of Leo I, after they passed from the old world—and getting rid of their old clothes was part of the ritual—to the new life, they put on Christ. So now we have a **baptismal garment.**

There is also a **new commissioning.** You are now to be light, so “**Receive the light of Christ.**”

Now in the actual liturgy of the Easter Vigil the whole idea is not, oh, let's watch while Janet is baptized. No, it's **let's enter into our own Baptism.** We are here to celebrate a Baptism, yes, but for the purpose of all of us entering into our own Baptism, which is, there is only “one Baptism.” **There is “one Baptism.” There is “one faith.” There is “one Church.” There is one body.** So we enter into that one Baptism. That's really the purpose of the ritual—not watching. Again, it's not a movie. The liturgy is not a movie; it's participation, so we enter into that Baptism. For that purpose the Church asks us on that night to **repeat our vows, our baptismal promises,** to renounce evil and darkness in

all its forms and accept Christ, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and belief in his work. So that's all part of the baptismal liturgy.

Now in the US, and only in the US, we also repeat the baptismal promises on Easter Sunday morning, but that is not Roman liturgy; that is US liturgy. So **the way we do our liturgy today is actually benefiting from thousands of years of understanding.**

Now when the candidates are brought up to the front they are joined by other candidates who have already been baptized in another communion, but who now want to join ours. But it's very important we realize **we do not rebaptize anybody.** We do not rebaptize because there is only one Baptism, and **Baptism is into Christ and into the body of Christ.** The body of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church, but it subsists beyond the boundaries of the Catholic Church as well. So in one way all the baptized are already sisters and brothers in Christ. If someone believes the Lord is leading them into the full communion with the Catholic Church, then we receive them also, but we honor their Baptism that they have already received. We don't use the word "convert" for these folks—unless we are careless. A convert is really someone who has come to Christ from some other faith or no faith. These candidates for full communion are not converts, except in a very limited, intellectual sense. They already belong to Christ.

Then we come to the **anointing of chrism.** Now the anointing of chrism is, again, a **reference back to the Messiah and the messianic age.** The anointing is the messianic anointing. Matthew and Mark and Luke, I believe, want us to feel that Jesus was anointed at his Baptism by the Holy Spirit, and that that was a sort of public announcement of his messianic identity. I think that is what they are trying to say. Well, when we bring candidates, catechumens who have just been baptized—now we call them "neophytes"—

to the front of the assembly, and they are joined with others who want to join our full communion, **we also anoint them with the oil that speaks of the Spirit**, the same Spirit that descended upon Jesus at his Baptism, the same Spirit that came upon the apostles at Pentecost, the same Spirit that Jesus imparted to his disciples on the evening of the resurrection of Easter Sunday. He breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive shall be forgiven.” **That’s the Spirit that we anoint these neophytes and candidates with.**

The word is *sphragis*, used in Aramaic, meaning “seal,” and it’s a little bit of an odd idea, but you remember Jesus said, “no one puts new wine in old wineskins”—remember that? He said, “It will leak out”—remember that story? So the image is, okay, people have these old wineskins. Why would they want to use them? Well, because they don’t stink because new wineskins stink. So if you put new wine in new wineskins, it stinks and you have to let it sit for a long, long time, and who wants to do that? So if you use old skins, you are kind of cheating, but that’s good, you know—getting a little ahead. But it doesn’t really work in the long run because the probability is they will split because they are old, and you will lose the wine. That was used to describe also us. That’s why Jesus said it. He didn’t say it because he was really interested in wine production. He said it because we also when the new wine of the Spirit is given to us, it can leak out of us because we are old. Right, isn’t that what he really means? So we have to be remade, but that remaking is a rather long process. So this idea of *sphragis* is actually **God’s life is given in Baptism and now we are going to seal it in as we cover the head with the oil that seals in the Spirit.**

And that is also, of course, the oil that smells of the balsam that we use in Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders. This is the royal oil used for prophets and kings because **now we are part of a royal family**; we are one with Christ. He is the king of the ages. Not of this age. The god of this age is the evil one, but Christ is King of the ages—that's different—the king of heaven, the kingdom of heaven—which is already breaking in now, which has broken in, which broke in throughout his whole life and ministry, and now is being glorified in him and in his followers. So the anointing is the preparation to live in the messianic age, which is not this age. **This is not the messianic age in its totality, but it's already breaking in.** It's a "not yet," and "yet already" sort of situation. As believers we are then to live in the messianic age, which is just coming into its own, but its power is not yet fully felt. So it's here, but not here in its fullness. We are the vanguard, you might say. **That's the anointing of oil, also called the Sacrament of Confirmation** in the West because the word "confirmation" means "strengthening." Through the gifts of the Spirit we receive strength to live out a life of witness. In the Eastern Church it's just called "Chrismation," because of the oil used.

Then finally we are led into the Easter Eucharist. **Now in the Easter Eucharist the emphasis is that Christ, who has died, is risen.** This is a truth and a mystery we celebrate all the time. In fact, every Sunday is a little Easter. But what we have to emphasize is not simply that Christ is present in the Eucharist—he is present in the Eucharist—but he is present precisely as the risen one. So the Eucharist is—we are **invited into an encounter with this risen Lord**—an encounter! That means that **we have to become more expert at finding him on the road**—the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Their eyes were suddenly opened, but he was with them all along.

So it is also with Christ. **The sacrament is given to us so that we know in faith that he is with us all along**—not just at the Eucharist, not just when we receive him. He is always with us. But **he comes to us so that we can become more aware of his presence all the time.**

Then as we complete our meal and we have become one with Christ through his power and his love and we have offered ourselves together with him in the sacrifice of the Mass, and we have paused to **enter deeply into contemplation**—although even then it's rather difficult to do perhaps at that moment, but **that's the purpose—then we are sent forth.** This liturgy that we have been talking about is finished. “The Mass is ended. Go in peace. Alleluia, alleluia.” “Go forth to love and serve the Lord. Alleluia, alleluia.” This is the **commissioning of the people now renewed in their Baptism and renewed in their faith.**

Now technically the Triduum doesn't end until Sunday evening with Vespers. We are not going to talk about the Mass Sunday morning because it's not that different from the Easter Vigil. But at this point now we are ready to be renewed, to live a new life in Christ, and we have celebrated our annual remembrance.

Bob Valle:

The newly baptized came to the altar at the Easter Vigil and this was the song that accompanied them. So it could be an interesting thing for us to end with this particular song, having gone through the three days, and maybe **pray Psalm 23 from the lens of what we experienced** on Holy Thursday from the washing of the feet, what we experienced through the reading of the Passion on Good Friday and the veneration of the

Cross, what we experienced through the telling of the story of the Exodus, crossing of the Red Sea, what we experienced from the Sacrament of Baptism and the anointing in Confirmation, and what we experience when we actually come to the Eucharistic table. So see it instead of through the lens of a funeral at that moment of death, but from all these multi-levels of meaning that we experience **during the Triduum**. Song: *Psalm 23*.