

CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP
AND THE DISCIPLINE OF THE SACRAMENTS

DIRECTORY
ON POPULAR PIETY AND THE LITURGY

PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES

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Holy Week

138. "In Holy Week, the Church celebrates the mysteries of salvation accomplished by Christ in the last days of the earthly life, beginning with his messianic entry into Jerusalem"(141).

The people are notably involved in the rites of Holy Week. Many of them still bear the traces of their origins in popular piety. It has come about, however, that in the course of the centuries, a form of celebrative parallelism has arisen in the Rites of Holy Week, resulting in two cycles each with its own specific character: one is strictly liturgical, the other is marked by particular pious exercise, especially processions.

This divergence should be oriented towards a correct harmonization of the liturgical celebrations and pious exercises. Indeed, the attention and interest in manifestations of popular piety, traditionally observed among the people, should lead to a correct appreciation of the liturgical actions, which are supported by popular piety.

Palm Sunday

Palms, olive branches and other fronds

139. Holy Week begins with Palm Sunday, or "Passion Sunday", which unites the royal splendor of Christ with the proclamation of his Passion"(142).

The procession, commemorating Christ's messianic entry into Jerusalem, is joyous and popular in character. The faithful usually keep palm or olive branches, or other greenery which have been blessed on Palm Sunday in their homes or in their work places.

The faithful, however, should be instructed as to the meaning of this celebration so that they might grasp its significance. They should be opportunely reminded that the important thing is participation at the procession and not only the obtaining of palm or olive branches. Palms or olive branches should not be kept as amulets, or for therapeutic or magical reasons to dispel evil spirits or to prevent the damage these cause in the fields or in the homes, all of which can assume a certain superstitious guise.

Palms and olive branches are kept in the home as a witness to faith in Jesus Christ, the messianic king, and in his Paschal Victory.

The Paschal Triduum

140. Every year, the Church celebrates the great mysteries of the redemption of mankind in the "most sacred Triduum of the crucifixion, burial and resurrection"(143). The Sacred Triduum extends from the Mass of the Lord's Supper to Vespers on Easter Sunday and is celebrated "in intimate communion with Christ her Spouse"(144).

Holy Thursday

Visiting the Altar of Repose

141. Popular piety is particularly sensitive to the adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament in the wake of the Mass of the Lord's Supper (145). Because of a long historical process, whose origins are not entirely clear, the place of repose has traditionally been referred to as "a holy sepulcher". The faithful go there to venerate Jesus who was placed in a tomb following the crucifixion and in which he remained for some forty hours.

It is necessary to instruct the faithful on the meaning of the reposition: it is an austere solemn conservation of the Body of Christ for the community of the faithful which takes part in the liturgy of Good Friday and for the viaticum of the infirmed (146). It is an invitation to silent and prolonged adoration of the wondrous sacrament instituted by Jesus on this day.

In reference to the altar of repose, therefore, the term "sepulcher" should be avoided, and its decoration should not have any suggestion of a tomb. The tabernacle on this

altar should not be in the form of a tomb or funerary urn. The Blessed Sacrament should be conserved in a closed tabernacle and should not be exposed in a monstrance (147).

After mid-night on Holy Thursday, the adoration should conclude without solemnity, since the day of the Lord's Passion has already begun (148).

Good Friday

Good Friday Procession

142. The Church celebrates the redemptive death of Christ on Good Friday. The Church meditates on the Lord's Passion in the afternoon liturgical action, in which she prays for the salvation of the world, adores the Cross and commemorates her very origin in the sacred wound in Christ's side (cf. John 19, 34)(149).

In addition to the various forms of popular piety on Good Friday such as the *Via Crucis*, the passion processions are undoubtedly the most important. These correspond, after the fashion of popular piety, to the small procession of friends and disciples who, having taken the body of Jesus down from the Cross, carried it to the place where there "was a tomb hewn in the rock in which no one had yet been buried" (Lk 23, 53).

The procession of the "dead Christ" is usually conducted in austere silence, prayer, and the participation of many of the faithful, who intuit much of the significance of the Lord's burial.

143. It is necessary, however, to ensure that such manifestations of popular piety, either by time or the manner in which the faithful are convoked, do not become a surrogate for the liturgical celebrations of Good Friday.

In the pastoral planning of Good Friday primary attention and maximum importance must be given to the solemn liturgical action and the faithful must be brought to realize that no other exercise can objectively substitute for this liturgical celebration.

Finally, the integration of the "dead Christ" procession with the solemn liturgical action of Good Friday should be avoided for such would constitute a distorted celebrative hybrid.

Passion Plays

144. In many countries, passion plays take place during Holy Week, especially on Good Friday. These are often "sacred representations" which can justly be regarded as pious exercises. Indeed, such sacred representations have their origins in the Sacred Liturgy. Some of these plays, which began in the monks' choir, so as to speak, have undergone a progressive dramatization that has taken them outside of the church.

In some places, responsibility for the representations of the Lord's passion has been given over to the Confraternities, whose members have assumed particular responsibilities to live the Christian life. In such representations, actors and spectators are involved in a movement of faith and genuine piety. It is singularly important to ensure that representations of the Lord's Passion do not deviate from this pure line of sincere and gratuitous piety, or take on the characteristics of folk productions, which are not so much manifestations of piety as tourist attractions.

In relation to sacred "representations" it is important to instruct the faithful on the difference between a "representation" which is commemorative, and the "liturgical actions" which are anamnesis, or mysterious presence of the redemptive event of the Passion.

Penitential practices leading to self-crucifixion with nails are not to be encouraged.

Our Lady of Dolours

145. Because of its doctrinal and pastoral importance, it is recommended that "the memorial of Our Lady of Dolours"(150) should be recalled. Popular piety, following the Gospel account, emphasizes the association of Mary with the saving Passion her Son (cf, John 19, 25-27; Lk 2, 34f), and has given rise to many pious exercises, including:

- the *Planctus Mariae*, an intense expression of sorrow, often accompanied by literary or musical pieces of a very high quality, in which Our Lady cries not only for the death of her Son, the Innocent, Holy, and Good One, but also for the errors of his people and the sins of mankind;
- the *Ora della Desolata*, in which the faithful devoutly keep vigil with the Mother of Our Lord, in her abandonment and profound sorrow following the death of her only Son; they contemplate Our Lady as she receives the dead body of Christ (the Pietà) realizing that the sorrow of the world for the Lord's death finds expression in Mary; in her they behold the personification of all mothers throughout the ages who have mourned the loss of a son. This pious exercise, which in some parts of Latin America is called *El Pésame*, should not be limited merely to the expression of emotion before a sorrowing mother.

Rather, with faith in the resurrection, it should assist in understanding the greatness of Christ's redemptive love and his Mother's participation in it.

Holy Saturday

146. "On Holy Saturday, the Church pauses at the Lord's tomb, meditating his Passion and Death, his descent into Hell, and, with prayer and fasting, awaits his resurrection"(151).

Popular piety should not be impervious to the peculiar character of Holy Saturday. The festive customs and practices connected with this day, on which the celebration of the Lord's resurrection was once anticipated, should be reserved for the vigil and for Easter Sunday.

The "Ora della Madre"

147. According to tradition, the entire body of the Church is represented in Mary: she is the "credentium collectio universa"(152). Thus, the Blessed Virgin Mary, as she waits near the Lord's tomb, as she is represented in Christian tradition, is an icon of the Virgin Church keeping vigil at the tomb of her Spouse while awaiting the celebration of his resurrection.

The pious exercise of the *Ora di Maria* is inspired by this intuition of the relationship between the Virgin Mary and the Church: while the body of her Son lays in the tomb and his soul has descended to the dead to announce liberation from the shadow of darkness to his ancestors, the Blessed Virgin Mary, foreshadowing and representing the Church, awaits, in faith, the victorious triumph of her Son over death.

Easter Sunday

148. Easter Sunday, the greatest solemnity in the liturgical year, is often associated with many displays of popular piety: these are all cultic expressions which proclaim the new and glorious condition of the risen Christ, and the divine power released from his triumph over sin and death.

The Risen Christ meets his Mother

149. Popular piety intuitively perceives a constancy in the relationship between Christ and his mother: in suffering and death and in the joy of the resurrection.

The liturgical affirmation that God replenished the Blessed Virgin Mary with joy in the resurrection of her Son (153), has been translated and represented, so as to speak, in the pious exercise of the *meeting of the Risen Christ with His Mother*: on Easter morning two processions, one bearing the image of Our Lady of Dolours, the other that of the Risen Christ, meet each other so as to show that Our Lady was the first, and full participant in the mystery of the Lord's resurrection.

What has already been said in relation to the processions of "the dead Christ" also applies to this pious exercise: the observance of the pious exercise should not acquire greater importance than the liturgical celebration of Easter Sunday nor occasion inappropriate mixing of liturgical expressions with those of popular piety (154).

Blessing of the Family Table

150. The Easter liturgy is permeated by a sense of newness: nature has been renewed, since Easter coincides with Spring in the Northern hemisphere; fire and water have been renewed; Christian hearts have been renewed through the Sacrament of Penance, and, where possible, through administration of the Sacraments of Christian initiation; the Eucharist is renewed, so as to speak: these are signs and sign-realities of the new life begun by Christ in the resurrection.

Among the pious exercises connected with Easter Sunday, mention must be made of the traditional blessing of eggs, the symbol of life, and the blessing of the family table; this latter, which is a daily habit in many Christian families that should be encouraged (155), is particularly important on Easter Sunday: the head of the household or some other member of the household, blesses the festive meal with Easter water which is brought by the faithful from the Easter Vigil.

Visit to the Mother of the Risen Christ

151. At the conclusion of the Easter Vigil, or following the Second Vespers of Easter, a short pious exercise is kept in many places: flowers are blessed and distributed to the faithful as a sign of Easter joy. Some are brought to the image of Our Lady of Dolours, which is then crowned, as the *Regina Coeli* is sung. The faithful, having associated themselves with the sorrows of the Blessed Virgin in the Lord's Passion and Death, now rejoice with her in His resurrection.

While this pious exercise should not be incorporated into the liturgical action, it is completely in harmony with the content of the Paschal Mystery and is a further

example of the manner in which popular piety grasps the Blessed Virgin Mary's association with the saving work of her Son.