

Praying Holy Week at Home



Holy Week 2020 is a Holy Week unlike any other in memory. But as we shelter in place, we join with the church in every age and place to remember God's saving acts in Jesus and in history. We also reaffirm our own call to participation in the mystery of God's love for us. While that love exceeds our understanding, ways of praying together are well within our grasp. This guide is offered by the formation and worship teams as a practical companion to Grace Cathedral's livestream, with suggestions on how to prepare for and participate in virtual church, as well as ways to observe outside it. Blessings on this most Holy Week.

Getting Ready to Pray at Home

Sacred space

- Consider setting aside a sacred area in your living space. This could be as simple as clearing off a corner of a shelf or table. Evoke your sense of the sacred in this space with items that recall life with God and the present season: a cross, a candle, icons, purple cloth, meaningful images, a Bible, prayer beads, a bowl of water....be creative! For more ideas, see [here](#).

Body

- Over the course of worship at Grace Cathedral, the people are invited to sit, stand, kneel, or walk. Reflect on the impact these postures and movements provide you and consider assuming them at a given point in the liturgy when you worship at home – or feel free to experiment!

Other people

- We realize that these are far from ideal circumstances and that many of us are in close quarters with others as we shelter in place. Consider how you might pray with and for those you live with as you worship from home. Be gentle with yourself and those around you if distractions arise.

Materials

- Families with small children may enjoy these [downloadable pages](#) for Holy Week.
- Consider how you pray best, or how you learn and engage the world. Would you hear the readings more deeply if you were drawing as you listened? Or if you were moving

as the psalms were sung? Do you have beads or meditation balls? Gather what helps you go deeper.

Palm Sunday

Palm Sunday begins the time in the Christian year known as Holy Week, and commemorates Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Each of the four gospels describe the crowds greeting Jesus by waving palm branches, and we ritually join them, shouting, "Hosanna!" in praise. From the songs of triumph and joy, the service turns to an account of Jesus' passion, suffering and death – preparing us for the solemn reflections of Holy Week.

Before the Livestream

- If possible, trim a piece of greenery from your yard or neighborhood or bring a small plant to virtually participate in the procession.
- Families with children are [invited to this parallel Link](#) during the 11 a.m. Palm Sunday livestream.
- Families with Children can further prepare for and supplement Palm Sunday worship with [materials here](#).

During the Livestream

- Consider how you might participate in a procession within your home. Creativity is very welcome!
- During the reading of the Passion Gospel, the vested ministers will stand at the reference to Golgotha, and, at the words "breathed his last," kneel and observe a moment of silence. Consider joining us in these postures from your homes.

Maundy Thursday

Maundy Thursday begins the Great Three Days — The Triduum — the holiest time in the Christian year. The name "Maundy" comes from the Latin mandatum, meaning commandment, given to the disciples as Jesus washed their feet: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another" ([John 13:34](#)).

At the center of our Maundy Thursday celebration is this Gospel command to mutual service and love. Although our ritual action adapts to the circumstances of sheltering in place, the meaning is unchanged: serving one another in love is a sign of our share in the life of Christ.

Before the Livestream

- Prepare a basin of warm water and towel for footwashing

Agape Meal

Consider preparing a simple, meatless meal and be seated at 5:30 p.m. Pray these or similar blessings¹ over the meal. Sparkling grape juice or another beverage may be substituted for wine.

Blessing Over Wine

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe. You create the fruit of the vine; and on this night you have refreshed us with the cup of salvation in the Blood of your Son Jesus Christ. Glory to you for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Blessing Over Bread

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe. You bring forth bread from the earth; and on this night you have given us the bread of life in the Body of your Son Jesus Christ. As grain scattered upon the earth is gathered into one loaf, so gather your Church in every place into the kingdom of your Son. To you be glory and power for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Blessing Over the Other Foods

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe. You have blessed the earth to bring forth food to satisfy our hunger. Let this food strengthen us in the fast that is before us, that following our Savior in the way of the cross, we may come to the joy of his resurrection. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

During the Livestream

- Feel free to eat during the Liturgy of the Word! Aim to finish the meal by the end of the homily so that you're ready for footwashing
- As the choir sings *Ubi Caritas*, make time for anyone who is participating at home to wash each other's feet
- If you are by yourself, wash your own feet with special care and intention
- At the end of the service, clear the table in reverent silence.

Other considerations

- If you're not able to join the livestream, have a simple meal at home, read and reflect on the Gospel (John 13:1-17, 31b-35), and wash one another's feet. Offer any prayers

¹ The Episcopal Church, ed. *The Book of Occasional Services*, p 84-85. New York, NY: Church Publishing, Inc., 2018. https://episcopalchurch.org/files/lm_book_of_occasional_services_2018.pdf.

on your hearts, including the Lord's Prayer. Conclude by clearing the table in reverent silence.

Good Friday

The Great Three Days or Triduum continue with Good Friday. Good Friday's solemn service invites draws us into a challenging and mysterious part of the Christian story: the suffering and death of Jesus, recounted Passion narrative. Grace Cathedral's tradition is to hear the gospel chanted by the choir to the ancient tones of the St. John Passion. We respond by offering prayers — the Solemn Collects — for the deep needs of our world, and finish by meditating on the Cross.

Before the Livestream

- Find a cross. If you do not have a cross, draw one or make one from twigs.
- Take 10 minutes to gather up and perhaps write your prayers for the world, and for any in need, including yourself.

During the Livestream

- Experiment with your posture (sitting, standing, kneeling) during the different parts of the service.
- During the dedicated time for veneration, spend a moment with the cross you have found or made. You might kneel before it, touch it reverently, kiss it, or simply bring your prayers, written or verbal, to Christ in this moment.

Other considerations

- Good Friday is a traditional fast day for the Church. Consider what that might mean for you in this context and circumstance.
- It is also traditional on this day to remember the Church in the Holy Land and to give as you are able. Learn about their work from [the American Friends of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem](#).
- If you are not able to join via livestream, read the Passion Gospel, take a moment to venerate the Cross, and gather your prayers for the Church, the world, and all those in need.

Easter Vigil

The Great Three Days, the Triduum, culminates with the Great Vigil of Easter. To "vigil" means to stay awake when we would normally be sleeping, especially to keep watch or pray — and so the Great Vigil of Easter begins with waiting. We listen by candlelight to the accounts of God's saving action in history, remembering the creation of the world and the deliverance of Israel at the Red Sea.

This sacred story continues, and is expressed for Christians most poignantly, in the life, death and resurrection of Christ. So we renew our participation in that life, recalling, as St. Paul wrote: “we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” (Romans 6:4 NRSV)

For millennia, Christians have been welcomed into the church at the Easter Vigil, through baptism as well as, more recently, confirmation, reception, and the reaffirmation of baptismal vows. Though we are dispersed this year, we renew our baptismal vows together, and celebrate the resurrected life we share as the Body of Christ.

Before the Livestream

- If we were gathering in the Cathedral, we would do so in darkness. Set the mood by keeping your home as dim as possible.
- Gather with a candle for each participant as well as matches.
- Prepare a bowl of water.

During the Livestream

- Dip your hand in the bowl of water and make the sign of the cross following the Baptismal vows. If you're worshipping with other people, you might asperge one another!
- Light candles during the singing of the *Exsultet*, following the renewal of baptismal vows.

Easter Sunday

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! In confidence, we gather virtually to celebrate the triumph of hope of despair, life over death, and love over hate. The first Eucharist of Easter is celebrated. Hear the stories of God's promise and the first disciples' amazement at the empty tomb; receive the assurance that the Risen Christ gave to Mary Magdalene: “Do not be afraid.” Our celebration is enriched by a quartet of men of the Cathedral Choir who ring out the beloved hymns and anthems of the feast. Sing along!

Before the Livestream

- Consider making some festive changes to your sacred space to reflect the shift from Lent to Easter. Can you incorporate fresh flowers?

Other considerations

- If it is fun for you, consider dressing up!
- Plan a festive meal for after the service and take time to celebrate!