

LITURGICAL CORNER (PART-1)

HOW MANY EASTER VIGIL CELEBRATIONS MAY A PARISH HAVE?

Each parish church is to have only one celebration of the Easter Vigil. This directive is liturgical Law and can be found in the *Sacramentary and in the Circular Letter Concerning the Preparation and Celebration of the Paschal Feasts, 94*: “The celebration of the Easter Vigil for special groups is not to be encouraged, since above all in the vigil the faithful should come together as one and should experience a sense of ecclesial community.”

For many people, it comes as a surprise that a parish would even think of having more than one Vigil celebration, and it should. After all, this liturgy is not only awesome and inspiring but also lengthy and complex. Still some parishes are faced with unique pastoral situations such as Masses in different languages or multiple worship sites in a particular parish. Some of these issues will be looked at in more detail below, but to answer this question, it is enough to state that there is to be one and only one Easter Vigil celebration in each parish. (Roman Missal pg. 378).

‘Dear brethren (brothers and sisters), on this most sacred night, in which our Lord Jesus Christ passed over from death to life, the Church calls upon her sons and daughters, scattered throughout the world, to come together to watch and pray. If we keep the memorial of the Lord’s paschal solemnity in this way, listening to his word and celebrating his mysteries, then we shall have the sure hope of sharing his triumph over death and living with him in God’.

WHY CAN THERE BE ONLY ONE VIGIL?

The purpose of celebrating the liturgies of the Church is always to give witness to the faith as a community, not as an individual or private group. Liturgical celebrations are public acts, open to all members of the Church. The Easter Vigil being the liturgy *par excellence*, is above all meant to gather the entire people of a parish community to celebrate the Pascal Mystery in its fullness. Masses are not permitted on Holy Saturday, priests are not permitted to celebrate private Masses. In order to participate in the Eucharist on Holy Saturday, one must attend the Easter Vigil. The power of the gathered assembly to prayer fuels the life of the Church. There is even a sense of the universal People of God gathered together for this special night in the texts for the Vigil found in the Roman Missal itself: “Dear friends in Christ, on this most holy night, when our Lord Jesus Christ passed from death to new life, the Church invites its sons and daughters throughout the world to come together to vigil and prayer.”

Ideally, every community ought to gather in its entirety each Sunday for Mass, but due to the large size of many parishes and a certain pastoral sensitivity to the schedules of people, multiple Sunday Masses are offered. This is not to be in the case for the Easter Vigil when on these very special holy days, we return to our roots as a people of faith gathered together in one assembly.

LITURGICAL CORNER (PART 2)

IS THE VIGIL, A SATURDAY NIGHT MASS FOR EASTER SUNDAY?

The Easter Vigil is never to be compared to a Saturday evening anticipated Mass, but rather, it in itself its own unique liturgy. The Vigil is not an anticipated Mass for Easter Sunday; however, attendance at the Easter Vigil does fulfil the Easter Sunday obligation.

“The entire celebration of the Easter Vigil takes place at night. It should not begin before nightfall; it should end before daybreak on Sunday.” (Sacramentary, p170) this rule is to be taken according to its strictest sense. Reprehensible are those abuses and practices which have crept in many places to violation of this ruling, whereby the Easter Vigil is celebrated at the time of day that is customary to celebrate anticipated Sunday Masses.”(Circular Letter Concerning the Preparation and Celebration of the Paschal Feasts,78).

No Masses whatsoever are to be celebrated on Holy Saturday before the Easter Vigil, and the Easter Vigil may never be celebrated until well after sunset on Holy Saturday.

CAN THERE BE AN EASTER MASS ON SATURDAY NIGHT AFTER THE EASTER VIGIL HAS CONCLUDED?

Once the Easter Vigil has been completed, Masses of Easter may be celebrated, even if it is still Saturday evening or very early Sunday morning. However, this should in no way affect the starting time of the Easter Vigil, which is to be at least 30 minutes after sunset.

It should be clear that the rites particular to the Easter Vigil are not to be repeated at any other Easter Mass. This means that at any Mass following the Vigil, there would be no service of light, no proclamation of the exsultet, no full initiation of the Elect, no blessing of Easter water. The paschal candle is lighted before the Mass starts and would remain in its place near the ambo for the entire liturgy. It may be incensed at the beginning of Mass. As stated in the rubric above, an extended liturgy of the word as at the Vigil would be permissible at an Easter Mass following the Vigil on Saturday evening. Required at all Easter Masses by the Sacramentary (p209) is the renewal of baptismal promises and sprinkling rite.

HOW LONG SHOULD THE EASTER VIGIL LAST?

The Easter Vigil should be as long as it takes to meaningfully and fully celebrate the rites of this special night. Given the additional rites of the Vigil and likely presence of the Elect for full initiation, it should easily take a minimum of four/five hours to celebrate. This should not be looked upon as a burden.

A successful Easter Vigil is not determined by how short it is, but by how short it feels. It is necessary to create a sense of flow in any liturgy but especially one as lengthy as the Easter Vigil. This ordinarily requires some rehearsal on the part of the liturgical ministers, including the presider and the RCIA sponsors (but not the Elect themselves who should experience if unrehearsed). When ministers know what they are doing; when items are in the right place before the Vigil begins; when musicians are aware

of proper cues, a sense of flow ensures and awareness of earthly time (kronos) will fade as the assembly enters God's time (kairos).

LITURGICAL CORNER (PART 3)

DO ALL THE READINGS OF THE EASTER VIGIL NEED TO BE READ?

'The restored order for the vigil has seven readings from the Old Testament, chosen from the Law and the Prophets, which are everywhere in use according to the most ancient tradition of East and West, and two readings from the New Testament, namely from the Apostle and from the Gospel. Thus the church, 'beginning with Moses and all the prophets' explains Christ's paschal mystery. Consequently, whenever this is possible all the readings should be read in order that the character of the Easter Vigil, which demands that it be somewhat prolonged, be respected at all costs.

"Where, however, pastoral conditions require that the number of readings be reduced, there should be at least three readings from the Old Testament, taken from the Law and the Prophets, and reading from Exodus 14 with its canticle must never be omitted." (*Circular Letter Concerning the Preparation and Celebration of the Paschal Feats*, 85)

Only in the most exceptional of cases should one eliminate a significant number of readings.

The setting of the readings must follow the liturgy of the church as well, meaning that the reading is to be proclaimed, followed by the appropriate psalm and the appropriate collect is prayed by the presider.

LITURGICAL CORNER (PART 4)

Questions on the Paschal Triduum.

1. When does the Triduum begin and end?

The Easter Triduum begins with the evening Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday, reaches its high point in the Easter Vigil, and closes with Evening Prayer on Easter Sunday.

2. May another Mass besides the Mass of the Lord's Supper be celebrated on Holy Thursday?

Ordinarily, no other Mass may be celebrated on Holy Thursday.

3. When should the Good Friday celebration of the Lord's Passion take place?

Normally it should take place in the afternoon, at about 3.00pm, to enable people to assemble more easily. However, pastoral discretion may indicate a time shortly after midday or in the late evening though never later than 9.00pm.

4. Does the Church encourage any other liturgical celebrations on Good Friday?

On this day the Office of Readings and Morning Prayer could appropriately be celebrated with the participation of the people in the churches. Note that Evening Prayer is only prayed by those who do not participate in the Celebration of the Lord's Passion.

5. Do devotions have a particular importance on Good Friday?

The *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy (2002)* provides the proper perspective in paragraphs 142-145. Clearly the central celebration of this day is the Good Friday Celebration of the Lord's Passion. In no way should manifestations of popular piety, either by the time or manner in which they are convoked, substitute for this solemn liturgical action. Nor should aspects of the various acts of piety be mixed with the Good Friday celebration, creating a hybrid. In recent times, Pasion processions, celebrations of the Stations of the Cross, and Passion Plays have become more common. In such representations, actors and spectators can be involved in a moment of faith and genuine piety. Care should be taken, however, to point out to the faithful that a Passion Play is a representation which is commemorative and they are very different from 'liturgical actions' which are *anamnesis*, or the mysterious presence of the redemptive event of the Passion.

6. How is the cross venerated by members of the congregation on Good Friday?

After the showing of the Cross, the priest or deacon may carry the Cross to the entrance of the sanctuary of another suitable place. The first person to adore the Cross is the priest celebrant. If circumstances suggest, he takes off his chasuble and his shoes. The clergy, lay ministers and the faithful then approach the Cross. The personal adoration of the Cross is an important feature in this celebration and every effort should be made to achieve it.

Only one Cross is to be venerated, because the act of personal veneration is the most important feature in this celebration. It will take time, but 'taking time' is essential to Good Friday. After some of the clergy, servers and representative of the faithful have venerated the cross, the celebrant may go the altar. Standing in front of the altar, facing the people, he invites the assembly to venerate the cross together with a few appropriate words. Then, for some moments, he holds it up for them to venerate in silence, meaning that all present should kneel in silent prayer for some moments.

7. How is the first Communion of the neophytes to be emphasized during the Easter Vigil?

The celebrant, before he says, 'Behold the Lamb of God', may make a brief remark to the neophytes about their first Communion and about the importance of so great a mystery, which is the climax of initiation and the centre of the Christian life. This is a night when all should be able to receive Holy Communion under both forms.

8. What directions are given for the celebration of Masses on Easter Sunday?

Mass is to be celebrated on Easter Day with great solemnity. A full complement of ministers and use of liturgical music should be evident in all celebrations. The rite of the renewal of baptismal promises takes place after the homily, followed by the sprinkling with water blessed at the Vigil, during which the antiphon *Vidi aquam*, or some other song of baptismal character should be sung.

9. Where is the paschal candle placed during the Easter season?

The paschal candle has its proper place either by the ambo or by the altar and should be lit at least in all the more solemn liturgical celebrations of the season until Pentecost Sunday, whether at Mass or at Morning and Evening Prayer. After the Easter season the candle should be kept with honour in the baptistery, so that in the celebration of Baptism the candles of the baptized may be lit from it. In the celebration of funerals the paschal candle should be placed near the coffin to indicate Christ's undying presence, his victory over sin and death, and the promise of sharing in Christ's victory by virtue of being part of the Body of Christ (*see Order of Christian funerals, no.35*) The paschal candle should not otherwise be lit nor placed in the sanctuary outside the Easter season.