

# Frequently Asked Questions About the 72 Hours of Easter

## What are the 100 Days all about?

During the 100 days between the Feast of the Transfiguration and the Feast of Pentecost, we are called to set aside time to reflect on what it means to live in love as the Body of Christ— with God, with each other, and with all of creation. In this time, we also take steps to deepen our understanding of the mystery of loving each other in spite of our differences, and we recommit ourselves to living out this ideal. We do this through personal and communal transformation, which we hope will bring Christ's love to our world. Our prayer for this season is, "**May all be One!**"

## What happens during the 72 Hours of Easter?

### - A Brief Description of the Four Major Rites

The 72 Hours of Easter, also known as the Easter Triduum, is one liturgy, one mass, with four distinct rites. The word Triduum means three days (72 Hours). According to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Though chronologically three days, they are liturgically one day unfolding for us the unity of Christ's Paschal Mystery." One day that just happens to have three sunsets and three sunrises.

The 72 Hour celebration of Easter is the first pinnacle of the 100 Days. The scriptures of these days guide us to an experience of God's deep desire to love us in the midst of community. We encounter this desire beginning with the intimacy of foot washing as Eucharist, and culminating in the renewal of our baptismal promises. Our rituals engage our bodies and all of our senses to help us move through the experience of life, grief, death and more life. These days are rich and full. Here is just a short glimpse of what happens at our celebration.

Thursday evening — The rite of **Fire and Foot Washing** welcomes us to the beginning of Easter. During this rite, we light the Easter fire, sing the Gloria and read the gospel story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet. We also have the opportunity to wash each other's feet as a form of Eucharist.

Friday afternoon — The rite of **Reverencing the Cross of Shalom**. On this evening, we read the Passion account from the Gospel of John, which is a triumphal passion where Jesus does not suffer. This is followed by the Nine Universal Prayers for the world. During this rite, we reverence the equidistant cross, which represents the tensions and struggles of our real lives as individuals

and as communities. This cross symbolizes our deep desire to move toward unity in the midst of our diversity—to become Shalom.

Saturday evening — The rite of **Great Night: Fire, Word, Vigil** begins with the lighting of the Paschal Candle. After the Exultet is sung, we listen to seven scripture stories of God’s deep desire for us to be one with God, with each other and with all of creation.

Sunday morning — The rite of **Water, Oil and Table**. During this rite we sing the Litany of Saints, hear the story of Jesus’ resurrection and appearance to Mary of Magdala, and renew our Baptismal promises with word, water, and oil. We celebrate Table Eucharist and become what we are — the Body of Christ.

### **What are the similarities and differences between how Holy Wisdom celebrates Easter and how other liturgical churches celebrate?**

#### **Similarities between the two models of celebration:**

- Both models use most of the same scriptures and tell the story of salvation history on Saturday night.
- Both models use the same basic outline of foot washing, and reverencing the cross.
- Both models have new members complete their initiation.

#### **Differences between the two models of celebration:**

- Palm Sunday is looked at differently in the two models. In the Holy Week model it marks the beginning of Holy Week. In the Lent/Easter model it is the last Sunday of Lent.
- The Lent/Easter model looks at the 72 hours as one long liturgy, while the Holy Week model breaks the Triduum celebration up into four separate services.
- The focus of the Holy Week model is on the reenactment of the death and resurrection of Jesus. The focus of the Lent/Easter model is on baptism and personal and communal transformation.
- The Holy Week model is based on atonement theology with an emphasis on being saved from our original sin. The Lent/Easter model is based on theosis theology, with an emphasis on original blessing. This difference is KEY!

### **How did these differences come about?**

On September 30, 1943, Pope Pius XII issued the encyclical, “Divino afflante Spiritu” (Inspired by the Divine Spirit).<sup>1</sup> This encyclical called for a new

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<sup>1</sup> [http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xii\\_enc\\_30091943\\_divino-afflante-spiritu.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_30091943_divino-afflante-spiritu.html)

translation of the Bible, to be made directly from the original Greek and Hebrew texts and not from the medieval Latin translation as had been traditional for many centuries. Answering this call, numerous scholars from various Christian and Jewish denominations and backgrounds flocked to the Vatican library. As the researchers poured through the collections, many ancient liturgical texts were rediscovered after having been buried for centuries. Among these were the three-year gospel cycle and the historical documents for preparation and initiation of those to be baptized at the liturgy of the Paschal Vigil.

Because of these discoveries, liturgical changes began to be instituted in the mid 1950's in the Roman Catholic Church and other Christian denominations. Interdenominational and Christian/Jewish interfaith collaborations produced new insights into scripture. These, coupled with the new translations of the bible and the incorporation of ancient liturgical practices, breathed new life into the Universal Church, and opened the door to the major reforms of Vatican II.

In 1955, Pope Pius XII called for the celebration of an abridged form of the all-night Easter Vigil practiced by the early church. Vatican II brought even more changes, and in the early 1970's the ancient Triduum (meaning three days - 72 Hours) was placed in the midst of Holy Week. Many liturgists believed that even more change was necessary, because the idea of Holy Week, based in Atonement Theology, and the idea of Triduum, based in Theosis Theology, did not mesh well in their minds. They called for an end to the Lent/Holy Week/Triduum model that liturgical churches were using and they began advocating for a Lent/Easter model, which is the model that the church used in ancient times and that Holy Wisdom uses today.<sup>2</sup>

### **What is theosis theology? How is it different from atonement theology?**

Here is a definition of [atonement theology, theosis theology, original sin and original blessing](#).

### **Are there new or unusual terms that I'll hear during these rites?**

Here are some things that you may not be familiar with.

**equidistant cross** - An equidistant cross is a cross where both the vertical and the horizontal beams are the same length — like a plus sign. + This was the cross image used by Christians for the first 1,000 years after the death of Jesus. The

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<sup>2</sup> Notebaart, James. "The Paschal Season, the Days of Sunday." *Liturgy – Journal of the Liturgical Conference* Vol. 3 no. 1 (1982): 9-13.

image of the crucifix (a cross with a body on it) has only been around since ca. 960 CE. During our liturgy, we reverence the equidistant cross. To us, the beams of this cross — equal in length, opposite in direction, and bound together — represent the tensions and struggles of our real lives as individuals and as communities, and symbolize our deep desire to move towards unity in the midst of our diversity—to become Shalom.

**O Breath of Our Oneness** - This form of God's name will come up often during our prayers. Breath is an image used throughout the scriptures. The name is a call for unity, oneness with God, with each other and with all of creation.

**Tomb-Womb-Sacred Union** - You'll hear this phrase frequently during the four rites of the 72 Hours of Easter. These symbolic words describe the journey of transformation. We take what needs letting go of, and place it in the tomb. This tomb becomes the womb of God and a place of loving transformation. When we are birthed as a new creation, we are brought into a sacred union with God, and with all. The early Christians believed this sacred union was the wedding chamber and the wedding banquet — also known as the Eucharistic table — where all are fed and nourished for the journey of new life. For the first few hundred years of Christianity, these words were used frequently by the Church Fathers (and by others) to describe the state of a person being baptized, and the state of their community immediately afterward while they were receiving their first communion.

### **Can you share something about the scripture translation?**

The scripture translation that Holy Wisdom uses for the 72 Hours of Easter brings everything that is happening into the present moment — to the here and now. The story is no longer taking place in the past. When listening to the scriptures being proclaimed, pay attention to what this does within you. Notice how Jesus the Christ is in the midst of our community, talking directly to us.

### **Do I have to attend all the rites?**

No. We encourage everyone to do what they are able to do.

### **Do I need to stay overnight at Gwinwood?**

No. You are welcome to commute to Gwinwood during the days or to join us on Zoom. If you come to Gwinwood for the day and you need a break, there will be couches available for napping, a chapel for praying, walking trails, a labyrinth, and places to sit and stare at the lake. Everyone is welcome to partake of the

beauty of the grounds. Many who have come for the day or have stayed overnight have found it a good community experience. Again, do what you're able to do!

**What is the 100 Day Retreat and how does the 72 Hours of Easter fit into it?**

Here is [more information on the 100 Days](#).

**What do I do if I want to learn more or have further questions?**

Kathleen has many articles and an extensive bibliography that she can share with you and she is always open to questions and conversation. Please feel free to contact her. Your questions are welcome!