

The priests of the CMRI who serve this chapel, in conformity with the decree issued in November 1955, use the “Restored Holy Week” which was thus ordered Pope Pius XII to be used by all who follow the Roman Rite. They thereby also act in obedience to the infallible decree of Vatican Council I in 1870, which said:

“And because, by the divine right of apostolic primacy, the Roman Pontiff is at the head of the whole Church, We also teach and declare that he is the supreme judge of the faithful; and that one can have recourse to his judgment in all cases pertaining to ecclesiastical jurisdiction. We declare that the judgment of the Apostolic See, whose authority is unsurpassed, is not subject to review by anyone; nor is anyone allowed to pass judgment on its decision....”

A GENERAL DECREE BY WHICH THE LITURGICAL ORDER OF HOLY WEEK IS RENEWED

From apostolic times Holy Mother Church has taken care each year to celebrate the principal mysteries of our Redemption, namely the passion, death and resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ, with an absolutely singular commemoration.

At first, the supreme moments of these mysteries, those of “the crucified, buried, and risen” Christ (St. Augustine, EP. 55,14), were recalled in a special three-day period. Soon a solemn commemoration of the institution of the most Holy Eucharist was added. Finally, on the Sunday immediately preceding the passion, a liturgical celebration of the triumphant messianic entry of Our Lord and King into the holy city was added. Thus there arose a special liturgical week which, by reason of the greatness of the mysteries celebrated, was designated as “Holy” and was enriched with exceptionally complete and sacred ceremonies.

In the beginning these rites were performed on the same days of the week and at the same hours of the day that the sacred mysteries occurred. Thus the institution of the Holy Eucharist was recalled on Thursday evening by the solemn Mass of the Lord’s Supper. On Friday there was a special liturgical function in the hours after noon recalling the Lord’s passion and death. Finally on Holy Saturday night, there began a solemn vigil which ended the following morning with the joy of the resurrection.

During the middle ages they began for various pertinent reasons to set an earlier time for the performance of liturgical services on those days, so that toward the end of that period all of these liturgical services had been transferred to the morning. This did not take place without detriment to the liturgical meaning and confusion between the Gospel narratives and the liturgical ceremonies attached to them. The solemn liturgy of the Easter Vigil in particular lost its original clarity and the meaning of its words and symbols when it was torn from its proper nocturnal setting. Moreover, Holy Saturday, with too early a recollection of the Easter gladness intruding into it, lost its original character as a day of mourning for the burial of the Lord.

In most recent times another change, very serious from a pastoral point of view, took place. For many centuries Thursday, Friday, and Saturday of Holy Week were holydays of obligation, so that the Christian people, freed from servile works, could be present at the ceremonies taking place on those days. During the course of the seventeenth century, however, the Roman Pontiffs themselves were compelled, because of the complete change in the condition of social life, to reduce the number of the holydays of obligation and to classify them as working days.

Hence the attendance of the faithful at these ceremonies necessarily decreased, especially because the services had long been moved back to the morning hours when schools, factories, and public business of every kind are usually open and functioning on working days throughout the world. As a matter of fact, common and almost universal experience shows that these solemn and important liturgical services of the last three days of Holy Week are often conducted by the clergy in church buildings that are almost deserted.

This is certainly to be regretted, since these liturgical services of Holy Week are endowed not only with a singular dignity, but also with a special sacramental force and efficacy for nourishing Christian life.

Nor can there be proper compensation for the loss of these liturgical functions through those pious devotional exercises which are customarily called extra-liturgical and which are performed in the afternoon hours of these three days.

For these reasons during recent years experts on the liturgy, priests having the care of souls, and especially the Bishops have sent earnest petitions to the Holy See begging that the liturgical functions of the last three days of Holy Week be restored to the hours after noon, as formerly, so that all the faithful might more easily be present at these services.

After considering the case carefully, Pope Pius XII restored the liturgy of the sacred vigil of Easter in 1951. The celebration was to be held at the discretion of the Ordinary and as an experiment. This experiment was highly successful everywhere, as many Ordinaries reported to the Holy See. These same Ordinaries also renewed their petitions for liturgical restoration for the other two days, asking that the sacred functions be moved back to the evening hours as had been done in the case of the Easter Vigil. Moreover evening Masses, provided for in the Apostolic Constitution "Christus Dominus" of January 6, 1953, were being said everywhere and were attended by many. With all these things in mind Pope Pius XII commanded the Commission of the Restoration of the Liturgy established by him to examine the question of restoring the Ordo of Holy Week and propose a solution. After obtaining that answer, His Holiness decreed, as the seriousness of the affair demanded, that the entire question be subjected to a special examination by the Cardinals of the Sacred Congregation of Rites.

The Cardinals gathered in an extraordinary session at the Vatican on July 19 of this year. They considered the affair thoroughly and voted unanimously that the restored Ordo of Holy Week be approved and prescribed, subject to the approval of the Holy Father.

After all this had been reported in detail to the Holy Father by the undersigned Cardinal Prefect, His Holiness deigned to approve what the Cardinals had decided.

Hence, by special mandate of the same Pope Pius XII, the Sacred Congregation of Rites has decreed the following:

I. The restored Ordo for Holy Week is Prescribed.

1. Those who follow the Roman rite are bound in the future to follow the Restored Ordo for Holy Week, set forth in the original Vatican edition. Those who follow other Latin rites are bound to follow only the time established in the new Ordo for the liturgical services.

2. This new Ordo must be followed from March 25, the second Sunday of Passiontide or Palm Sunday, 1956.

3. Throughout the entire Holy Week no commemoration is admitted and, in the Mass, “orationes imperatae” (collects prescribed by an Ordinary), however they may have been ordered, are also forbidden.

II. On the Proper Hours for the Celebration of the Sacred Liturgy of Holy Week.

ON THE DIVINE OFFICE (paragraphs 4 and 5 are omitted here. ed.)

ON THE MASS OR THE PRINCIPAL LITURGICAL FUNCTION

6. On Palm Sunday the solemn Benediction and the Procession of Palms are held in the morning at the accustomed hour. Where the office is said in choir, the proper time is after Terce.

7. On Thursday of the Lord’s Supper the Mass of the Chrism is celebrated after Terce. The Mass of the Lord’s Supper, however, is celebrated in the evening at the most convenient time, but not before five P.M. nor after eight P.M.

8. On the Friday of the Lord’s passion and death the solemn liturgical service is celebrated in the afternoon about three o’clock. If there is some pastoral reason to do so, it is allowable to choose a later hour, but not after 6 P.M.

9. The solemn Easter Vigil is to be celebrated at a fitting time, one which will permit the solemn Mass of this vigil to begin about midnight of the night between Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday. Where the conditions of the faith and of the place make it fitting in the judgement of the Ordinary to anticipate the hour for celebrating the vigil, this should not begin before twilight, or certainly not before sunset.

III. On Extending Lenten Abstinence and Fasting until the Midnight of Holy Saturday.

10. The abstinence and fasting prescribed for Lent which, up until this time, according to Canon 1252, s.4, ceased after noon on Holy Saturday will in the future cease at midnight of the same Holy Saturday.

All things to the contrary notwithstanding.

November 16, 1955

Gaetano Cardinal Cicognani,
Prefect, Sacred Congregation of Rites

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+A. Carinci, Archbishop of Seleucia
Secretary, Sacred Congregation of Rites