

Rev. Fr. Leonard Goffine's

The Church's Year

Instruction on Holy Saturday

Why is this day called Holy Saturday?

Because on this day Jesus, the Holy of holies, rested in the sepulchre, and because the Church today blesses the new fire, the Easter candle, and the baptismal water.

Why is fire struck anew, blessed, and the lamps and candles in the Church lighted from it?

In ancient times it was customary to strike a new fire every day, bless it, and light the candles from it, and later this was done every Saturday; in the eleventh century this ceremony was restricted to Holy Saturday. The fire is struck from a stone to indicate, that Christ is the light of the world, and the Stone which the Jews rejected has now become the Corner stone of His Church; (Ps. CXVII. 22.) that the divine Son, the light of the world, was apparently extinguished at His death, but at His resurrection shone anew; that all those who witness this ceremony today be spiritually enlightened hereafter. This fire is blessed, because the Church blesses every thing that is used for divine service, and because the light and fire represent Christ, who brought the fire of love upon earth with which to enkindle our hearts. (Luke XII. 49.)

What is represented by the triple candle?

The triple candle represents the most Holy Trinity of which the second Divine Person came down upon the earth as the true light. For this reason the priest (or deacon) sings at the lighting of each candle: Lumen Christi, Light of Christ, and kneeling, three times humbly adores the Triune Deity, and especially Christ the true, divine Light. The chanter responds Deo gratias, Thanks be to God.

What does the Easter candle signify?

It is an emblem of Christ who has risen from death. Christ the true Light leads us from the bondage of Satan into the freedom of the children of God as the pillar of fire led the children of Israel out of the bondage of Egypt. The five holes in the candle represent the five wounds of Jesus by which mankind was healed, (I Pet. II. 24,) and the five grains of frankincense signify the spices with which the body of our Lord was embalmed.

Why are all the candles and lamps lighted from the triple candle?

To show that Christ was begotten by the Father of Light from all eternity, and is therefore true God from true God, true Light from true Light, from whom enlightenment is diffused over all men. (II Cor. IV, 6.)

To what do the twelve prophecies refer which are read before the blessing of the baptismal font?

They have reference to Christ in whom the predictions contained therein were verified. The number corresponds to the twelve apostles, who announced their fulfillment to the world.

Why is the baptismal water blessed with so many ceremonies, and what is its signification?

The baptismal water is blessed with so many ceremonies that the different effects of baptism may be shown, and that the holy Sacrament may be administered and received with more reverence and devotion; it signifies the blood of Christ by which our souls are purified.

What is the meaning of these ceremonies?

The priest with his hand parts the water in the form of the cross, to illustrate that God gives to it the virtue of regenerating all those born in original sin, making them children of God through Christ who died on the cross. He touches the surface of the water with the palm of his hand, to show that the Holy Ghost is over this water as at the creation, and bestows many graces on those who are baptized. He blesses it, signing it three times with the sign of the cross, because the water receives its sin-cleansing power only through the sufferings and the merits of Christ, from the Father, by the cooperation of the Holy Ghost. The baptismal water is thrown by the priest towards the four parts of the earth, because the grace of baptism should reach all nations. The priest breathes on the water three times in the form of a cross, as the Creator breathed into man the breath of life; Christ breathed upon the apostles the divine Spirit who by His grace and power revives and sanctifies those who are baptized. The Easter candle, (emblem of Christ, risen from the dead) is dipped three times into the water each time deeper, to show that the baptized should become more and more enlightened through the light of Christ's doctrine, more and more penetrated by, its divinity, more and more purified from sin. The people are sprinkled with this water to remind all those present who have received sanctification in baptism, and have lost it by sin, that they should strive to regain it by true repentance. Finally, oil and chrism are mixed with the water as a sign that the grace of the Holy Ghost of which these are figures, is given through the water to those who receive this Sacrament; and also, that the baptized should, after baptism, devote themselves to the service of Christ, the Anointed One, and unite themselves in love to Him.

Why is the baptismal water blessed only on this day and on the Saturday before Pentecost?

Because in early times converts were baptized only on these days; and because the risen Saviour is the example of a soul sanctified by the Holy Ghost in baptism.

How should we assist at the blessing of the baptismal water?

With sentiments of sincere gratitude for the grace of baptism; with the firm resolution of preserving our baptismal innocence, or if we have lost it, of gaining it by penance. We should renew our baptismal vows especially on this day by saying the apostle's creed, making acts of faith, hope, love, and contrition; and renounce anew the devil, all his pride, and all his suggestions.

Why does the priest prostrate himself after blessing the baptismal water, and rise again after the litany of the saints has been chanted?

To most humbly ask God, by the intercession of the saints, that He would give to all men the grace of baptism, that as all men have been dead and buried in sin, so they may rise with Christ as new creatures to grace and eternal life.

Why are the altars decorated on this day?

Because the Church, the beloved bride of Christ, desires to announce in advance to her children the glad tidings, that the Lord has risen from the dead; she decorates herself therefore, and causes the bells to peal and joyous hymns, to resound. It also has reference to the glorious, incorruptible body with which Christ adorned Himself at His Resurrection.

Why is there no Introit in this day's Mass?

The Introit of the Mass was formerly an entire psalm which was sung while the people were assembling in church; but as in early times the people on Easter were already assembled to assist at the ceremonies, no Introit was sung at the Mass. The Church observes the same practice, although she abolished the night vigils on account of the abuses to which they gave rise.

COLLECT O God, who makest this most sacred night illustrious by the glory of the Resurrection of our Lord, preserve in the new offspring of Thy family the spirit of adoption, which Thou hast given them; that being renewed in body and soul, they may serve Thee with purity of heart. Thro' the same &c.

EPISTLE (Coloss. III. 1-4.) Brethren: If you be risen with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God: mind the things that are above, not the things that are on the earth. For you are dead, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ shall appear, who is your life, then shall you appear with him in glory.

After the epistle the priest sings three times: Alleluia as a joyful exclamation over the Redeemer's triumphant victory.

EXPLANATION St. Paul places Christ's, resurrection before us as the example and, motive of the spiritual resurrection from sin, which should be effected in us by the holy Sacraments at Easter. With Christ we should die to the world, and live hidden in Him, if we desire to rise at the Last Day with Him in glory, and be acknowledged before all men by Him as His own.

GOSPEL (Matt. XXVIII, 1-7,) In the end of the Sabbath, when it began to dawn towards the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalen, and the other Mary, to view the sepulchre. And behold there was a great earthquake. For an angel of the Lord descended from heaven: and coming, rolled back the stone, and sat upon it. And his countenance was as lightning, and his raiment as snow. And for fear of him, the guards were struck with terror, and became as dead men. And the angel answering, said to the women: Fear not you: for I know that you seek Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, for he is risen, as he said. Come, and see the place where the Lord was laid. And going quickly, tell ye his disciples that he is risen: and behold, he will go before you into Galilee; there you shall see him. Lo, I have foretold it to you.

What are we to learn from this gospel?

That we, too, will receive the plenitude of divine grace and heavenly blessings, if like these pious women we seek Christ early, that is, by making a good intention before we begin our work.

Why is there no Credo or Agnus Dei said, nor the kiss of peace given, and why are short vespers said after communion?

Formerly, the Credo or confession of faith was said by the newly baptized, the Agnus Dei was sung in the litany of the saints, and these are therefore omitted in the Mass. The kiss of peace is, not given, because Christ had not yet said to His disciples, Peace be with you. Short vespers are said after the priest's communion, because this day, is a type of the eternal Sabbath in heaven which has no vespers, that is, evening.

Do not omit on this day to thank our Lord for the many graces He has given us through His passion and death. If in the evening the solemn ceremonies of the resurrection are held, assist at them and there make the repeated resolution to rise from the sleep of sin and begin a new life with Christ.

Thank you for visiting: <http://www.JMJsite.com>. Please share this information and tell others about this website.