

Liturgical Guidelines for Holy Week in 2021

In anticipation of the Holy Week liturgies last year, the Congregation for Divine Worship had issued a number of broad guidelines. Similar guidelines are not expected from the Holy See in 2021, so local dioceses and parishes will need to bring together current civic laws and mandates, the knowledge gained from nearly a year of living amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, and norms of the Holy Week liturgies into a celebration of the Paschal Mystery of Christ that is both reverent and safe for all involved.

In general terms, the current [guidelines for the celebration of the Mass](#) and sacraments still apply, including social distancing, reasonable sanitization measures of surfaces, wearing masks. Unless local regulations direct otherwise, churches may be occupied up to 50% capacity. Liturgically, holy water fonts ought to remain empty, the exchange of peace omitted, and communion distributed only under the species of bread. If the use of more than one cantor is desired, choir size should be limited to few voices arranged according to social distance practices. If necessary, please revisit these guidelines at diolc.org.

Pastors should apply the specific guidelines for each of the Holy Week liturgies as local circumstances dictate. In some instances, these directions apply the Holy See's 2020 norms to the present conditions, as well as our own Diocesan Holy Week guidelines of 2020.

Palm Sunday

1. The first form of the Palm Sunday entrance, the Procession, should not be used. Instead, parish churches should use the second form of the Palm Sunday entrance, called the Solemn Entrance (see Roman Missal: Palm Sunday, 12), or the Simple Entrance (16).
2. The Solemn Entrance allows for the people to take their seats in the nave at the beginning of Mass, and only the ministers to process into the church. In this case, ushers should distribute palms to the faithful as they enter the church building, rather than the faithful taking palms from a single pile or collection of palms.
3. The Simple Entrance makes no provision for the blessing of palms. If the pastor chooses this entrance but still wishes to distribute palms to the faithful, palms should be blessed outside of Mass, either before or after, using the "Order for the Blessing of Religious Articles" from the Book of Blessings, perhaps incorporating the prayer for the blessing of palms as found in the Roman Missal for Palm Sunday (6). If no palms will be distributed, it is not necessary to bless palms.
4. The priest or deacon can read the Gospel narrative straight through; it is not necessary to divide the parts into different voices.

Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper

1. Ideally, the Mass of the Lord's Supper begins with the tabernacle empty (Roman Missal: Mass of the Lord's Supper, 5). Enough breads should be consecrated for communion to the homebound and viaticum over the next days.
2. The Washing of the Feet is to be omitted. In its place—and as another suitable way to respond at this Mass to Jesus' mandate of fraternal charity—parishes should highlight the unique rubric at the Mass at the offertory, where "gifts for the poor may be presented with the bread and wine" (14). Outside of the Mass, the faithful should find other means to respond to Christ's "new commandment to love one another" (John 13:34).
3. At the conclusion of Mass, the procession to the place of reservation is omitted and the Blessed Sacrament is to be returned to the tabernacle. Thus, following communion, the ciborium is placed on the corporal and the Prayer after Communion is said from the chair. If the tabernacle is located in the sanctuary, the ciborium is placed in the tabernacle, and the Sacrament is incensed before closing the tabernacle door (39). All present may then remain for the traditional period of adoration. If the tabernacle is located elsewhere in the church, the ciborium should stay on the altar so that those in the nave may remain in the church for a brief period of adoration before returning the Blessed Sacrament to its place of reservation.

Good Friday

1. The priest or deacon can read the Gospel narrative straight through; it is not necessary to divide the parts into different voices.
2. The Solemn Intercessions take place as usual, but Bishop Callahan asks that the eleventh petition offered in 2020 be repeated in 2021 amid the ongoing pandemic:

XI. For an end to the pandemic

Let us pray, dearly beloved, for a swift end to the coronavirus pandemic that afflicts our world, that our God and Father will heal the sick, strengthen those who care for them, and help us all to persevere in faith.

Let us kneel. *Prayer in silence.* Let us stand.

Almighty and merciful God, source of all life, health, and healing, look with compassion on our world, brought low by disease; protect us in the midst of the grave challenges that assail us and in your Fatherly providence grant recovery to the stricken, strength to those who care for them, and success to those working to eradicate this scourge. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

3. The adoration of the Cross by kissing it shall be limited solely to the celebrant. After the priest has adored the cross, he may hold “the Cross elevated higher for a brief time, for the faithful to adore it in silence” (Roman Missal: Good Friday, 19). Alternatively, ministers may hold the cross at the front of the sanctuary and the faithful may process forward single file, observing social distance, and venerate the cross by genuflecting or bowing (without touching or kissing it). The cross can remain before the altar at the conclusion of the liturgy so that the faithful may continue to pray and meditate upon it (33; also *Paschalis Sollemnitatis*, 71)
4. The communion rite takes place as usual: the altar is covered with cloth and candles, and then the Blessed Sacrament is carried to the altar from its place of reservation. Following communion, the Sacrament is returned to the tabernacle or its previous place of reservation (29).
5. Following the liturgy, the altar candles are removed and the altar is stripped; the cross remains in place for a time.

Easter Vigil

1. Rather than the usual gathering, blessing of the Easter fire, and blessing of the Paschal Candle outdoors, the faithful, having received individual candles from ushers, should take their seats in the nave of the church, which is somewhat darkened. The priest and ministers begin the Vigil Mass as described in the Roman Missal at number 13: “Where, because of difficulties that may occur, a fire is not lit, the blessing of fire is adapted to the circumstances. When the people are gathered in the church as on other occasions, the Priest comes to the door of the church, along with the ministers carrying the paschal candle. The people, insofar as is possible, turn to face the Priest. The greeting and address take place as in no. 9 above; then the fire is blessed and the candle is prepared, as above in nos. 10–12.”
2. Ideally, those preparing to receive the Sacrament of Baptism ought to receive it at the Easter Vigil; but the reception of this sacrament may be delayed according to circumstances. Similarly, candidates for full communion may receive the Sacrament of Confirmation at this Mass or it may be delayed.
3. Baptismal water ought to be blessed at the Paschal Vigil so that the faithful may take it home. The sprinkling with holy water may take place or be omitted according to local discretion. Holy water fonts at the entrances of the church are to remain empty.

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