



THE ENTOMBMENT OF OUR LORD:

A Devotional Conclusion to the Liturgy of the Passion

When I was six or seven years old, my great-uncle, Felix, took me to Church on Good Friday. St. Hedwig Church on Hoyne Avenue was very unlike my own parish—which was Irish American. It had been the church of my great-grandparents — a venerable Polish landmark in an ethnic enclave known as “Bucktown.” For me, St. Hedwig’s Italian Renaissance interior echoed and re-echoed with unfamiliar music, Latin prayers, and a seemingly endless and emotional Polish sermon. I was astonished to see people who, during the veneration of the cross, approached on their knees. It has been fifty-seven years, but I shall never forget the multitudes, young and old, “creeping to the cross.” It was both strange and beautiful to behold!

Later, Uncle Felix took me by the hand and led me to the ornate *Grob Panski* or “Tomb of the Lord.” There, a life size figure of Christ lay in state for mourners. At that time, I thought it strange that Jesus should have a “wake.” Still, my impression was vivid. The reality of Jesus’ burial brought home the fact of His death in a way nothing else could for a six year old.

For many years, I did not experience anything remotely like Good Friday at St. Hedwig’s. I presumed it was a Polish custom, but would discover that the rite known as the “*Depositio*” (“*Deposition*”) can be traced back to Jerusalem and much of medieval Europe. Liturgical historian, James Monti, explains why some have never witnessed the Good Friday—Holy Saturday custom.

Following the Liturgy of the Passion there are no further liturgical services in the Roman Rite on Good Friday. Yet the desire to commemorate the concluding scenes of the Passion has resulted in a variety of devotional exercises focusing on the death and burial of our Savior. These devotions build upon the themes of the Liturgy of the Passion, and help the faithful to continue their reflections upon the events of the solemn day.

In the Western Church, the earliest clear evidence of such customs goes back to the tenth century. Often, the cross was central to the rite or a shroud. But it was St. Ulrich, the tenth century Bishop of Augsburg, who began the custom of “burying” the Holy Eucharist rather than the cross. The Sacrament was deposited in a symbolic sepulcher to be brought forth from the “tomb” on Easter Sunday.

Through its long and varied evolution, the “*depositio*” began to include a sculpted figure of the dead Lord or *Epitaphion* (a shroud with and embroidered figure of Christ in death).

The “*depositio*” or “Tomb” of the Lord became a popular custom in Italy, Spain, France, the Philippines, and especially Austria, Catholic Germany, and Poland.

In German and Polish versions of the “Tomb,” *tableaux* include flowers, candles, and other figures keeping vigil. Almost invariably, the monstrance with a host consecrated on Holy Thursday is covered by a thin veil and is displayed above or near the tomb. In the Polish tradition, the same monstrance is carried in procession at a dawn Mass on Easter Sunday.

With this historical background and St. Isaac Jogues’ ethnic diversity, it seems fitting to share, at least in part, the tradition of displaying a sepulcher from Good Friday night until Holy Saturday afternoon. For some—Poles, Germans, Italians, and Filipinos—it is a familiar expression of piety. For others, it is traditional and yet new! As a multicultural

American parish, the way we share tradition, customs, and beliefs reflects Christ's universal inclusive love. Let me conclude with a quote from Maria von Trapp, recalling Good Fridays of her youth!

Like the crèche around Christmas time, so the Holy Sepulcher on Good Friday would be an object of pride for every parish... I still remember the atmosphere of holy awe stealing over my little hearth when as a child I would make the rounds of churches. There in the Holy Sepulcher He would rest now, watched by His faithful until Holy Saturday afternoon.

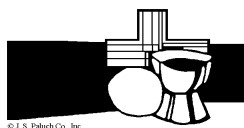
- Fr. Luczak

Stewardship.....Sunday Collections

Weekly (This Year) 3/9/08—\$9,863.01

(Last Year) 3/6/07—\$13,375.95

“The Lord God has given me a well– trained tongue, that I may know to speak to the weary a word that will rouse them.” says Isaiah in today's first reading. The gifts God has given us are likewise given for the good of others. How am I using my gifts?



SPIRITUAL LIFE

FOR OUR PRAYER AND REFLECTION

From a sermon by St. Andrew of Crete, bishop—“Let us go together to meet Christ on the Mount of Olives. Today he returns from Bethany and proceeds of his own free will toward his holy and blessed passion, to consummate the mystery of our salvation. He who came down from heaven to raise us from the depths of sin, to raise us with himself, we are told in Scripture, *above every sovereignty, authority and power, and every other name that can be named*, now comes of his own free will to make his journey to Jerusalem. He comes without pomp or ostentation. As the psalmist says: *He will not dispute or raise his voice to make it heard in the streets*. He will be meek and humble, and he will make his entry in simplicity.

Let us run to accompany him as he hastens toward his passion, and imitate those who met him then, not by covering his path with garments, olive branches or palms, but by doing all we can to prostrate ourselves before him by being humble and by trying to live as he would wish. Then we shall be able to receive the Word at his coming, and God, whom no

limits can contain, will be within us.

In his humility Christ entered the dark regions of our fallen world and he is glad that he became so humble for our sake, glad that he came and lived among us and shared in our nature in order to raise us up again to himself. And even though we are told that he has now ascended above the highest heavens—the proof, surely, of his power and godhead—his love for man will never rest until he has raised our earthbound nature from glory to glory, and made it one with his own in heaven.

So let us spread before his feet, not garments or soulless olive branches, which delight the eye for a few hours and then wither, but ourselves, clothed in his grace, or rather, clothed completely in him. We who have been baptized into Christ must ourselves be the garments that we spread before him. Now that the crimson stains of our sins have been washed away in the saving waters of baptism and we have become white as pure wool, let us present the conqueror of death, not with mere branches of palms, but with the real rewards of his victory. Let our souls take the place of the welcoming branches as we join today in the children's holy song: *Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the king of Israel.*”