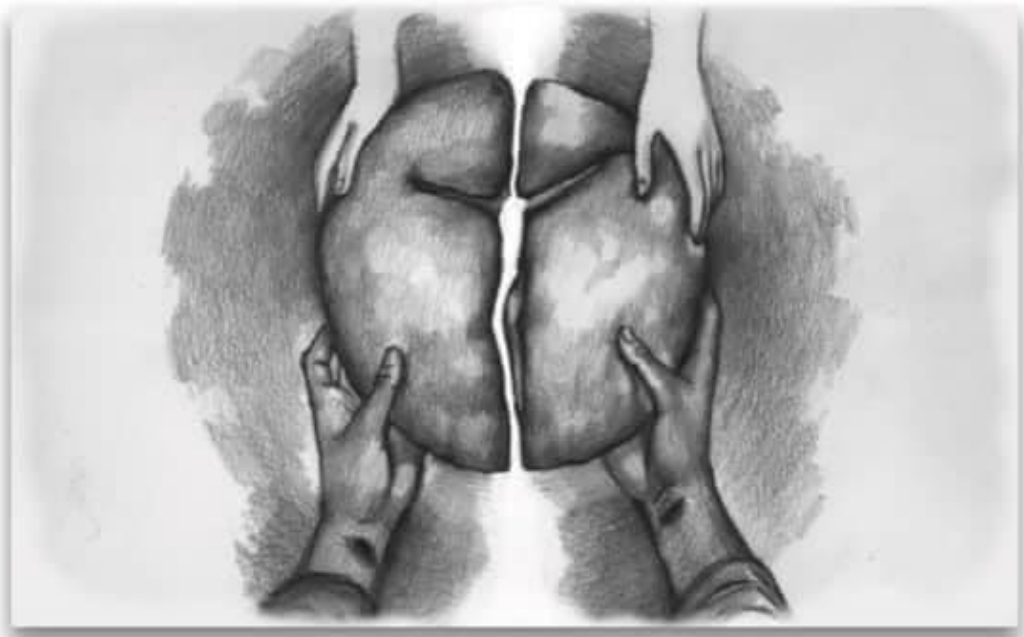


Holy Thursday



Visits to the Seven Churches

Holy Thursday: Pilgrimage to the Seven Churches

By Stephanie A. Patka

Holy Thursday is the feast that marks the end of Lent and the beginning of the Holy Triduum, which also includes Good Friday, Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday. At this Mass of the Lord's Supper Catholics remember the Passover meal, when Jesus instituted the sacrament of the holy Eucharist by sharing bread and wine with his disciples, saying, "Do this in memory of Me."

At the end of the Holy Thursday Mass, the Eucharist is placed on a temporary "altar of repose" away from the sanctuary. It is customary for the faithful to process together to this altar and spend time in quiet prayer and adoration. In the Roman Missal, it states: "The faithful are invited to continue adoration before the Blessed Sacrament for a suitable length of time during the night, according to circumstance."

The Seven Churches Visitation is a tradition that grew out of this time of prayer and adoration. Catholics remember when Jesus asked his disciples to stay and watch with Him while they were in the garden. This tradition of mindful watching is a sort of pilgrimage to various altars of repose, in different churches that correspond to each of the seven places, or "stations," that were made by Jesus between the Last Supper in the Upper Room to His crucifixion on the cross.

The seven stations consist of: Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22: 39-46), Jesus bound and taken before Annas (John 18: 19-22), Jesus taken before the High Priest, Caiaphas (Matthew 26: 63-65), Jesus taken before Pilate (John 18, 35-37), Jesus taken before Herod (Luke 23: 8-9; 11), Jesus taken before Pilate again (Matthew 27: 22-26) and Jesus given the crown of thorns and led to his crucifixion (Matthew 27: 27-31).

Upon entering each church, pilgrims visit the altar of repose, kneel, make the sign of the cross, read the appropriate scripture for each station and engage in private prayer and adoration. Some may add other prayers as well. At the seventh station, many will close their pilgrimage by opting to observe a Holy Hour.

The origin of the Seven Churches Visitation is typically credited to St. Philip Neri and is practiced by Catholics around the world, including in Poland, Mexico, Italy and the Philippines. The devotion can also be traced back to the Station Churches of Rome, where the tradition is still practiced. More information is also available in George Weigel's book "Roman Pilgrimage: The Station Churches."

Some will argue that the Holy Thursday pilgrimage has roots in the Book of Revelation, in which the Seven Ancient Churches are visited by an angel. For those who live in an urban area with several Catholic churches nearby, they may want to visit seven different churches. However, those who live in a rural area can still take part in the tradition by praying all seven stations. For participating families with young ones, adaptations can be made for the sake of time and parish availability. Pilgrims may choose to say prayers for two stations at one location.

The Seven Churches Visitation is a powerful way to spend time in adoration, meditating on Christ's sacrifice of love for the salvation of souls in preparation for the joy of Easter. There is something special about visiting churches late into the night. It is not just because of the opportunity to visit other parishes, it's because of intentionally seeking Christ to spend time with Him and contemplating the gift of His love.

The Stations of the Seven Churches

The pilgrimage to each church corresponds to the seven "stops" or "stations" of the *via crucis* that were made by Jesus on his way to Calvary.



First Visit

Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane

(Luke 22: 39-46)

39 And He came out and proceeded as was His custom to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples also followed Him. 40 When He arrived at the place, He said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." 41 And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and began to pray, 42 saying, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done." 43 Now an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him. 44 And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground. 45 When He rose from prayer, He came to the disciples and found them sleeping from sorrow, 46 and said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not enter into temptation."

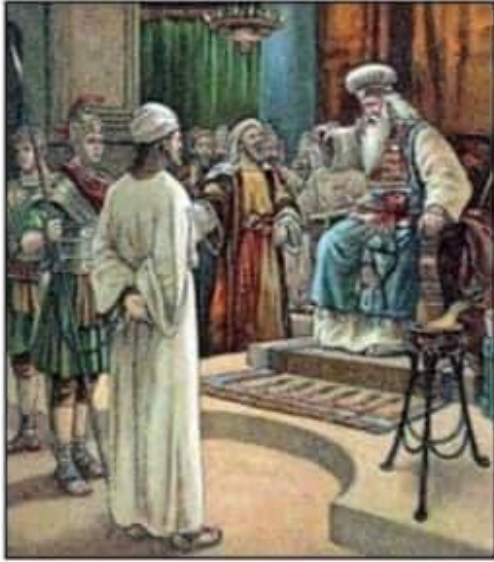
2nd Visit

Jesus bound and taken before Annas

(John 18: 19-22)

19 The high priest then questioned Jesus about His disciples, and about His teaching. 20 Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and I spoke nothing in secret. 21 Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; they know what I said." 22 When He had said this, one of the officers standing nearby struck Jesus, saying, "Is that the way You answer the high priest?"





3rd Visit

**Jesus taken before the High Priest, Caiaphas
(Matthew 26: 63-65)**

63 But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to Him, "I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God." 64 Jesus *said to him, "You have said it yourself; nevertheless, I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven." 65 Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, you have now heard the blasphemy!"

4th Visit

**Jesus taken before Pilate
(John 18,35-37)**

35 Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?" 36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." 37 Therefore Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."





5th Visit

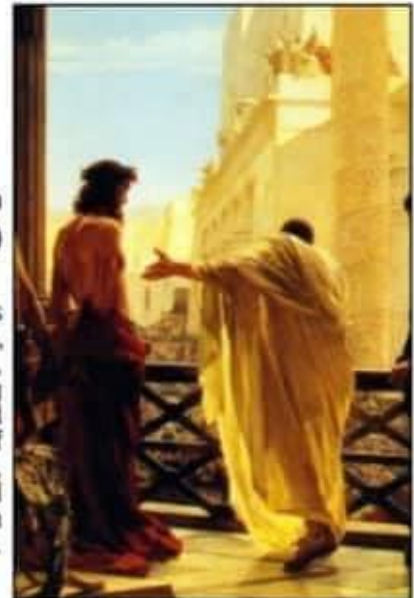
Jesus taken before Herod (Luke 23: 8-9; 11)

8 Now Herod was very glad when he saw Jesus; for he had wanted to see Him for a long time, because he had been hearing about Him and was hoping to see some sign performed by Him. 9 And he questioned Him at some length; but He answered him nothing. 10 And the chief priests and the scribes were standing there, accusing Him vehemently. 11 And Herod with his soldiers, after treating Him with contempt and mocking Him, dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate.

6th Visit

Jesus taken before Pilate again (Matthew 27: 22-26)

22 Pilate *said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all *said, "Crucify Him!" 23 And he said, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they kept shouting all the more, saying, "Crucify Him!" 24 When Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather that a riot was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this Man's blood; see to that yourselves." 25 And all the people said, "His blood shall be on us and on our children!" 26 Then he released Barabbas for them; but after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified.





7th Visit

**Jesus given the crown of thorns
and led to his crucifixion
(Matthew 27: 27-31)**

27 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole Roman cohort around Him. 28 They stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him. 29 And after twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand; and they knelt down before Him and mocked Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 30 They spat on Him, and took the reed and began to beat Him on the head. 31 After they had mocked Him, they took the scarlet robe off Him and put His own garments back on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him.

Act of Adoration by St. Francis of Assisi

We adore You, Most Holy Lord, Jesus Christ, here and in all the churches of the whole world, and we bless You because by Your Cross You have redeemed the world. Have mercy on us.

From the Homily of Pope St. John Paul II

World Youth Day, Sunday, August 24, 1997 in Paris, France

"Rabbi, where are you staying?" Each day the Church responds: Christ is present in the Eucharist, in the sacrament of His death and resurrection. In and through the Eucharist, you acknowledge the dwelling-place of the Living God in human history. For the Eucharist is the Sacrament of the Love which conquers death. It is the Sacrament of the Covenant, pure Gift of Love for the reconciliation of all humanity. It is the gift of the Real Presence of Jesus The Redeemer, in the bread which is His Body given up for us, in the wine which is His Blood poured out for all. Thanks to the Eucharist, constantly renewed among all peoples of the world, Christ continues to build His church: He brings us together in praise and thanksgiving for salvation, in the communion which only infinite love can forge. Our worldwide gathering now takes on its fullest meaning, through the celebration of the Mass. Dear young friends, may your presence here mean a true commitment in faith! For Christ is now answering your own question and the questions of all those who seek the Living God. He answers by offering an invitation: This is My Body, take It and eat. To the Father He entrusts His supreme desire: that all those whom He loves may be one in the same communion.

"God dwells in our midst, in the Blessed Sacrament of the altar."

- St. Maximilian Kolbe