



A Short Guide to

**HOLY
WEEK**

in the Parish of

Great St Bartholomew
West Smithfield in the City of London

Holy Week, the annual liturgical commemoration of the passion, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, begins on Palm Sunday and ends with the Easter Vigil.

Palm Sunday recalls two aspects of the Passion — the joyful entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, when the people cried ‘Hosanna!’ and the arrest, trial and crucifixion of Jesus, when the people cried ‘Crucify him!’ and mocked him on the cross. At the 9.00 a.m. Holy Communion, the Passion Gospel is read. Then comes the Palm Procession. We gather by 11.00 a.m. in the nearby Church of St Bartholomew the Less. The palm branches and palm crosses are blessed and we set out.

At the head of the procession are two thurifers swinging smoking 18th century Venetian thuribles; then comes the processional cross, framed by palms, and escorted by two acolytes bearing lanterns. The cantors who will sing the Passion are in red copes and the ministers — Celebrant, Deacon and Sub-Deacon — in red vestments. The banners of the Passion wave in the breeze as we come across Barts Square and, following Bartholomew Close, go into Cloth Fair. Our voices echo in the narrow streets as we sing ‘Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim’. Gathered in West Smithfield before the Gate, we proclaim Christ as the King of Glory and begin the traditional Palm Sunday hymn, dating from the 8th century, ‘All glory, laud, and honour to thee Redeemer King’. We enter the Priory Church and take our places for the Solemn Eucharist of the Passion, during which the choir will sing Victoria’s haunting setting of the Gospel. After this the organ is silent, and the Church is heavy with sorrow at the death of the Saviour as we, in celebrating the Eucharist ‘proclaim the Lord’s death, until he comes’.

Palm Sunday evening offers a moving dramatic sequence of words, action and music, entitled *Into the Hands of Sinners*. It takes us through the Passion, recalling the triumphant entry into Jerusalem, the anointing of Christ’s feet, the last supper with his disciples, the betrayal, the crucifixion and ending with the sealing in the tomb.

Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of Holy Week have no distinctive liturgies or ceremonies but are days for preparation and reflection. The Holy Communion is celebrated twice on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, at 8.30 a.m. and 12.30 p.m.

Maundy Thursday is known in Latin as *Feria Quinta in Coena Domini* — the fifth day of Holy Week commemorating the supper of the Lord (*coena Domini*). The liturgy today focuses on Jesus’ last

supper with his disciples and his institution of the Holy Eucharist (also known as the Lord's Supper, Mass, the Liturgy and the Holy Communion). But St John tells us that on the night in which he was betrayed Jesus washed the feet of his disciples and gave them a new commandment, that they should love each other as he loved them. The English *Maundy* comes from the Latin word *mandatum*, meaning a commandment. During the evening Solemn Eucharist the celebrant washes the feet of a number of men and women. (They are invited to participate in advance, so you needn't worry about being chosen from the congregation during the service!) At the end of the Eucharist, the High Altar is stripped of candles, cloths and frontal, and left bare. Meanwhile, some of the consecrated bread, the Body of Christ, is taken to the Lady Chapel. There we watch with Jesus for one hour as we recall his arrest in the garden of Gethsemane, his fleeing disciples, and his trial.

Good Friday is the day of the Lord's Passion — his crucifixion, death and burial in a borrowed tomb. The first event of the day at St Bartholomew's is the distribution of the Butterworth Charity, which takes place in the churchyard. Joshua Whitehead Butterworth, an antiquarian and a member of the firm of law publishers, created the charity to continue a custom which had prevailed in the parish for many years, of providing the sum of 6d (six old pence) to twenty-one poor widows of the parish and of giving buns to the children who attended. The formal act of distribution continues every Good Friday at 11.30 a.m.

F*eria sexta in Parasceve* is the historic liturgical title for Good Friday — the eve of the Sabbath and, as the Authorised (King James') Version renders it, the Day of Preparation. The central liturgical act today is the Solemn Liturgy of the Passion at 12 noon. It begins with the three ministers prostrate before the bare High Altar. A prayer and reading take us swiftly to the singing of the Gospel of the Passion, again in a setting by Victoria. After the sermon, a great crucifix is carried into the church so that Christ Crucified can be the focus of our worship. The cross can be venerated by coming forwards to kiss it — known anciently as 'creeping to the cross'. The Prayers of the Church are followed by Holy Communion received from the consecrated bread set aside the evening before. Candles burn for the last time and then every flame is extinguished as Christ is laid in the tomb.

At seven o'clock in the evening we have a service called *Tenebrae*. The name literally means *darkness*. This is the special form of Mattins and Lauds used during the *Sacrum Triduum*, the last three days of Holy Week. It is extraordinarily effective, atmospheric and beautiful.

Progress through the service is marked by a special triangular candle stand placed to the side of the High Altar and bearing fifteen candles. As each section of the service is completed, a candle is extinguished until only one is left burning at the tip of the triangle. This is then taken and hidden behind the High Altar while the choir sings. Once they have finished, the congregation is encouraged to bang with their hands or with books on the chairs or desk in front of them as loudly as possible to demand the return of the light. When the demand is sufficient, the light is shown again briefly beside the High Altar before being extinguished to mark the end of the service.

Saturday of Holy Week is not ‘Easter Saturday’ but Holy Saturday (*Sabbato Sancto*) or Easter Eve. Throughout the day a team of clergy and servers will prepare the Church for the celebration of Christ’s Resurrection. Gold frontals are put on the altars, the crosses are unveiled, and all the candles and lamps are renewed or refilled. Gold vestments are laid out in the sacristy and the minister who will sing the *Exsultet*, the Easter proclamation, may be rehearsing. In the cloister a brazier is prepared for the new fire and the great Paschal Candle is prepared. ‘Paschal’ comes from the word ‘Pascha’ meaning both Passover and Easter.

The Easter Vigil begins when it is dark. The cloister is full of shadowy figures, ministers, choir and people ready for the service to begin. Suddenly there is a flame of fire and the wood in the brazier is lit. Faces are illumined by the flames and the celebrant begins the liturgy. The great Paschal Candle, symbol of the Risen Christ, is blessed and lit, and the light spreads to the hand-candles held by the people. The Candle is proclaimed as ‘The Light of Christ’ and carried in procession to the great candlestand in the middle of the Church. A minister then sings the *Exsultet*, which explains the symbolism of the Paschal Candle, after which all the candles in the church are lit. A series of readings follow concluding with the Easter Gospel and the joyful announcement: ‘Alleluia! Christ is risen!’ The Vigil concludes with the singing of the *Te Deum*, a mighty hymn of praise, during which altar, candle, statues and banners are censed, and then the first blessing of Easter is given.

Easter Day itself is not part of Holy Week, for Sunday, the day of Resurrection, is the first day of the week. However, the Easter Day liturgy completes the vigil, including the blessing of water and the renewal of the promises that we made or that were made for us at baptism (or Christening, as it is often called).

Musicians have always been inspired by the Lord's Passion and all our choral services include some of the greatest music written for the liturgies of Holy Week. Full details of our music are available in the church or from our website, www.greatstbarts.com.