

Feriae Hebdomadae Sanctae

Lectio Divina by Fr. Randy Soto

I. Lectio

A. Having arrived to the climactic point of our Lenten Pilgrimage, we are invited by Mother Church to prepare ourselves more intensively to witness the “passing” of the Lord during his Paschal mystery.

B. The ferial days of Holy Week have the distinctive characteristic of helping the People of God to enter into the *Triduum* with a better understanding of God’s Plan of Salvation. Each day God’s Word introduces us to new insights which make us grow in our love and understanding of Jesus’ Sacrificial Death. Each day and in an *in-crescendo* mode the readings of the Mass prepare us to witness the tragedy of Jesus’ final week within the theological framework of the *promise-fulfillment* motif: The Synoptic Δεί “it was necessary” (*that Jesus should suffer and die on the Cross in order to redeem humanity*) is understood as the fulfillment of everything foretold in the OT.

C. A synopsis of these four days can be very helpful to see this progression:

Ferial days of Holy Week

Monday	1 st Is 42	The 1st Canticle of the Suffering Servant <i>I, the LORD, have called you for the victory of justice, I have grasped you by the hand; I formed you, and set you as a covenant of the people, a light for the nations.</i> (Promise)	Jesus interprets the anointing as anticipation for his burial. Mary’s action is the promise, and the actual burial on Good Friday is the fulfillment: <i>Let her keep this for the day of my burial.</i>
	Ps 27	<i>The Lord is my light and my salvation.</i> (Prayer)	
	Jo 12	The Anointing of Jesus at Bethany <i>Mary took a liter of costly perfumed oil made from genuine aromatic nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and dried them with her hair; the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.</i> (Fulfillment)	
Tuesday	1 st Is 49	The 2nd Canticle of the Suffering Servant <i>The LORD called me from birth; from my mother’s womb he gave me my name. He made of me a sharp-edged sword and concealed me in the shadow of his arm.</i> (Promise).	Jesus’ Word like a two-edged sword declares Judas betrayal and Peter’s Negations, and interprets them as part of his glorification: <i>Now is the Son of Man glorified,</i>
	Ps 71	<i>I will sing of your salvation</i> (Prayer).	
	Jo 13	Jesus foretells Judas’ Betrayal and Peter’s negations: <i>Amen, amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me [...] Amen, amen, I say to you, the cock will</i>	

not crow before you deny me three times **(Fulfillment)**.

and God is glorified in him.

Wednesday	1 st Is 50	The 3rd Canticle of the Suffering Servant <i>He is near who upholds my right; if anyone wishes to oppose me, let us appear together. Who disputes my right? Let him confront me. See, the Lord GOD is my help; who will prove me wrong? (Promise).</i>	Jesus appears together with Judas. The judgment is at hand: <i>Then Judas, his betrayer, said in reply, "Surely it is not I, Rabbi?" He answered, "You have said so."</i>
	Ps 69	<i>Lord, in your great love, answer me (Prayer).</i>	
	Mt 26	Betrayal of Judas <i>They paid him thirty pieces of silver, and from that time on he looked for an opportunity to hand him over (Fulfillment)</i>	
Chrism Mass	1 st Is 61	Isaiah announces the coming of the Messianic era <i>The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; He has sent me to bring glad tidings [...] You yourselves shall be named priests of the LORD, ministers of our God shall you be called For ever (Promise).</i>	Jesus Christ honors his name as the Messiah who has come to save us and to constitute all the baptized into a kingdom in which all share in his eternal priesthood: <i>"Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing."</i>
	Ps 89	<i>I will sing the goodness of the Lord (Prayer).</i>	
	Rev 1	John testifies to our final participation in Jesus anointing: <i>To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his Blood, who has made us into a Kingdom, priests for his God and Father, to him be glory and power forever and ever. Amen (Fulfillment).</i>	
	Lk 4	Jesus declares himself as the Messiah to come <i>The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings (Fulfillment).</i>	

III. Meditatio

A. The oils constitute the sacramental sign of these four days. We begin by mentioning the anointing of Jesus at Bethany and we conclude by the consecration and blessing of the oils at the Chrism Mass on Thursday morning.

B. As sacramentals we must remember that these visible and tangible elements of creation are consecrated (SC) and blessed (OC, OI) by the Bishop (Christ) so that the Church may use them in the administration of the sacraments throughout the whole year, beginning with the catechumens to be baptized at the Easter Vigil.

C. The Preface for this Chrism Mass declares poetically the theology of the Christian Priesthood. Christ, the only Pontiff (High Priest) of the New Covenant has chosen men from among men so that by the imposition of hands they may share in his holy mission. The institution of the hierarchical ministry is the most beautiful heritage

(*kleronomia*, from which we get in English clergy) that Jesus has left to his Church. For priests, by virtue of the priestly anointing, are given the *munera* to sanctify, to teach and to shepherd Christ's flock.

D. On Holy Thursday, the Presbyteral College renews its promises before the People of God and the Bishop. This renewal is a precious sign of fraternal communion and of fidelity to the commandment to love one another.

E. Through the sacraments, the priests help the faithful grow closer to Christ and to receive the sanctifying grace contained in them *ex-opere operato*. Through the sacraments the entire Church is able to grow in the Theological Virtues of Faith, Hope and Love: and with these in place, to be able to enter into Heaven.

G. The Oil for the Sick (OI) is blessed by the Bishop so that it may instill God's healing grace onto the sick and help them to respond better to their medical treatment. Should their illness turn to worst, it also gives them courage, hope, peace and resignation. The special grace of the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick has as its effects: a) The uniting of the sick person to the passion of Christ, for his own good and that of the whole Church; b) The strengthening, peace and courage to endure in a Christian manner the sufferings of illness or old age; c) The forgiveness of sins, if the sick person was not able to obtain it through the sacrament of Penance; d) The restoration of health, if it is conducive to the salvation of his soul; e) The preparation of his soul for passing over to eternal life. It consolidates the existent intrinsic union between sick and the Suffering Christ. Finally it accompanies the sick in their final journey to God's Celestial dwelling (CCE §§ 1500-1532).

H. The Oil for the Catechumens (OC or OS) is blessed by the Bishop so that it may prepare the hearts of the catechumens to love with Christ's Heart. Just as oil is used to lubricate motors so the OC lubricates our hearts to beat one-in-synchrony with the Heart of Jesus; and just as oils are used in cosmetics help to delineate and accentuate even better natural beauty, the OC help us to grow in stature and beauty in the presence of the Lord. *Since Baptism signifies liberation from sin and from its instigator the devil, one or more exorcisms are pronounced over the candidate. The celebrant then anoints him with the oil of catechumens, or lays his hands on him, and he explicitly renounces Satan. Thus prepared, he is able to confess the faith of the Church, to which he will be "entrusted" by Baptism* (CCE § 1237).

I. The Holy Chrism (SC) This oil imprints character on the neophytes (newly baptized) so that they may fulfill the triple mission conferred to them with the Baptismal Regeneration: to be like Christ King, Prophet and Priest (CCE § 1241). It imprints character on the confirmandi so that they may receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit in order to give witness to Christ to the whole world. *From this fact, Confirmation brings an increase and deepening of baptismal grace: a) it roots us more deeply in the divine filiation which makes us cry, "Abba! Father!"; b) It unites us more firmly to Christ; c) It increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us; d) It renders our bond with the Church more perfect; e) It gives us a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witness of Christ, to confess the name of Christ's body, and never to be ashamed of the Cross.* (CCCE § 1286-1321). It imprints character in the neo-presbyter so that he may receive God's sanctifying grace in his hands to be able to absolve sins and to confect the Eucharist. *This sacrament configures the recipient to Christ by special grace of the Holy Spirit, so that he may serve as Christ's instrument for his Church. There are three degrees in this sacrament: a) The 3rd degree is called Deacon. Deacons are ministers ordained for tasks of service*

of the Church; they do not receive the ministerial priesthood, but ordination confers on them important functions in the ministry of the word, divine worship, pastoral governance, and the service of charity, tasks which they must carry out under the pastoral authority of their bishop. These can be transitional, that is, conferred only to men on the way to become Presbyters; or they can be Permanent, which is conferred to married man; b) The 2nd degree is called Presbyter. Presbyters are ordained to the ministerial priesthood by the imposition of hands of the Bishop and are called to assist the Bishop in the Pastoral care of the Diocese. At ordination the presbyter is incorporated in the College of Presbyters, which means that he is called to exercise his ministry in communion with the Bishop and the other priests of the diocese; c) The 1st degree or fullness of Holy Orders is called Bishop. Bishops are ordained to be Christ, the Head and the Shepherd in the Local Church and to be the link of communion with the Universal Church. Upon ordination the Bishop becomes a member of the College of Bishops with Peter and under Peter to govern, teach and sanctify the faithful (CCE§§ 1537-1600). Finally it seals the altar that is consecrated that the altar is constituted a *Sacrificial Ara* where priests could immolate the sacrifice of our Salvation at the Eucharistic Celebration.

III. Oratio

Synopsis of the Eucological Texts

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Chrism Mass
EA	Come to our aid; Lord, strength of our salvation	Do not hand us over to the power of our enemy	All knees must bend to acknowledge the Glory of your Cross, Oh Lord.	Christ has made us a kingdom and priests of God his Father.
OP	Give us life through the Passion of your son	Grant us to celebrate with faith the mystery of the Passion of our Son; to taste the sweetness of your forgiveness.	Lord you wanted Jesus to die on the Cross to liberate us; grant us to unite him also in the Glory of his Resurrection	Through the anointing of the Spirit, You made your Son the Messiah and You made us members of his body.
PG	Make the Tree of the Cross produce fruits of Life Eternal	Make us to come to possess plentifully these gifts in you heavenly kingdom	Accept this offering which witness to the passion of your Son in our lives.	May this sacrifice purify us from sin; grow within us new life; and grant us salvation.
PRE	Passion II: We contemplate closely the Paschal Mystery which marks the defeat of our enemy and the splendid event of our Redemption	contemplate closely	Royal Priesthood: In Christ's name, your priests renew the sacrifice of Redemption and prepare for your children the Paschal Banquet, where the Holy People congregates in love, is nourished with you word and is strengthened with the	

PC	When we call you, Lord; come in haste to our aid.	This Eucharistic bread which we eat in this world, obtain for us perfect communion in Heaven.	sacraments Grant us the certainty of being regenerated to life eternal in the death of your Son.	Grant that all who have participated in your sacraments may manifest to the world Christ's presence.
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III. Contemplatio

A. From the book *On the Holy Spirit* by Basil the Great, 4th century

By one death and resurrection the world was saved

When mankind was estranged from him by disobedience, God our Savior made a plan for raising us from our fall and restoring us to friendship with himself. According to this plan Christ came in the flesh, he showed us the gospel way of life, he suffered, died on the cross, was buried and rose from the dead. He did this so that we could be saved by imitation of him, and recover our original status as sons of God by adoption.

To attain holiness, then, we must not only pattern our lives on Christ's by being gentle, humble and patient, we must also imitate him in his death. Taking Christ for his model, Paul said that he wanted to become like him in his death in the hope that he too would be raised from death to life. We imitate Christ's death by being buried with him in baptism. If we ask what this kind of burial means and what benefit we may hope to derive from it, it means first of all making a complete break with our former way of life, and our Lord himself said that this cannot be done unless a man is born again. In other words, we have to begin a new life, and we cannot do so until our previous life has been brought to an end. When runners reach the turning point on a racecourse, they have to pause briefly before they can go back in the opposite direction. So also when we wish to reverse the direction of our lives there must be a pause, or a death, to mark the end of one life and the beginning of another.

Our descent into hell takes place when we imitate the burial of Christ by our baptism. The bodies of the baptized are in a sense buried in the water as a symbol of their renunciation of sins of their unregenerate nature. As the Apostle says: *The circumcision you have undergone is not an operation performed by human hands, but the complete stripping away of your unregenerate nature. This is the circumcision that Christ gave us, and it is accomplished by our burial with him in baptism.* Baptism cleanses the soul from the pollution of worldly thoughts and inclinations: *You will wash me,* says the psalmist, *and I shall be wither than snow.* We receive this saving baptism only once because there was only one death and one resurrection for the salvation of the world, and baptism is its symbol.