

The Easter Triduum leads to understanding of Passion

On Ash Wednesday, the mark of ashes on our foreheads led us into our journey of faith in the Holy Season of Lent. Throughout this journey, we have tried to make some progress in our spiritual lives so we can be ready to celebrate Easter.

Many people consider Good Friday and Easter Sunday as the two distinct days on which the Church celebrates the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Based on Scriptures, this is true. However, for us to understand the spirituality of Easter, we journey through a three-day period known as Easter Triduum: Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday. During this period Mother Church “solemnly celebrates the greatest mysteries of our redemption, keeping by means of special celebrations the memorial of her Lord, crucified, buried and risen.”

The celebration of the Easter Triduum helps us to understand the deeper meaning of the passion, death and the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. It also helps us to understand our own journey of faith as Christians, and to ponder the events leading to our redemption.

The first stage of our journey is on Holy Thursday when we celebrate the evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper. At this celebration the Church reenacts all that took place “on the night that Jesus was betrayed” — the institution of the Holy Eucharist by Jesus, the gift of the priesthood and our call to serve each other symbolized by Jesus washing the feet of His disciples. After the Mass, we have a period of adoration of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament in an appropriate place until midnight.

When we visit a church on Good Friday, the Blessed Sacrament is absent, crosses have been veiled or removed, the altar is bare and no holy water is at the door. We can feel the “emptiness”



FR. YAW ACHEAMPONG



The risen Christ is depicted in this 16th-century painting titled *The Resurrection of Christ, from the right wing of the Isenheim Altarpiece* by Matthias Grunewald. (CNS/Bridgeman Images)

and the “darkness” in the church. We solemnly celebrate the liturgy of the Passion and the Death of our Lord on Good Friday at 3 p.m., the time according to Scriptures when our Lord died on the cross. On the edge of sadness all seems lost on Good Friday — “darkness has come over the whole land” and has conquered the light.

On the next day, Holy Saturday, we enter the third and the last stage of our journey to celebrate Easter. We feel the anxiety and the anticipation as we prepare for the celebration of the Easter Vigil.

The Easter Vigil is considered as the high point of the Christian year. The celebration is full of symbolism. It begins in the night and outside of the front door to the church where the Paschal Candle (representing the Risen Lord in His glory) is lit from a specially prepared bonfire. Then the faithful with candles are led by the priest or the deacon carrying the Paschal Candle into the church full of darkness.

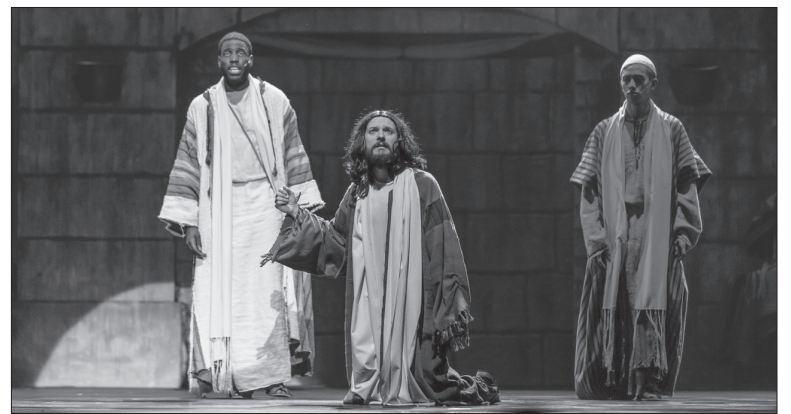
In the church, the Easter Proclamation known as Exsultet is proclaimed. The night is described as “truly blessed,” with “sanctifying power” and “shall be as bright as day.” Baptism and reception of new members into the Church community takes place at the Easter Vigil Mass. The Easter Vigil celebration foretells of the light of hope of Easter and leads us into the celebration of Easter Sunday.

Easter Sunday is when we encounter the Risen Lord in the living reality of the present, in the community of believers and in the world around us. The resurrection of Jesus from death brings us a new beginning, a new creation and a new hope.

As we rejoice at the celebration of Easter we also hope to become faithful witnesses who bring the victory of life over death and light into the world through our good works of love, justice and peace to others.

Now is the time for us to rejoice and shout “Alleluia” — for the Lord is truly risen.

(Fr. Acheampong is the pastor at Our Lady of Peace Parish in Scarborough, Ont.)



Peter and Jesus in a scene from the 2017 Passion Play. (Photo by Venrick Azcueta)

Passion Play casts characters in new light

BY MEGGIE HOEGLER
The Catholic Register

If Mary Magdalene could retell the story of Jesus’ resurrection, what would she say?

That’s what scriptwriters at Christian Performing Arts asked themselves when writing their 2018 New Passion Play.

For 27 years, the Church on the Queensway in Etobicoke has staged a passion play at Easter. Each year, director Arthur Wachnik tries to find new perspectives and points of view to approach the story of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

“Last year it was narrated from the Jewish perspective by Annas the High Priest. This year’s version has a very unique voice. It’s coming from the perspective of both Mary Magdalene and the thief on the cross,” said Wachnik, who first became involved in the Passion Play as an actor seven years ago.

Mary Magdalene and the thief are described as “sassy and charming outcasts” whose lives are forever changed when they encounter a mysterious man from Galilee.

“We wanted to tell this story through characters that the audience can identify with,” said Wachnik. “It can be difficult to identify with Jesus because, well, he’s Jesus! He is perfect and none of us come close to that. The

audience tends to connect more with characters that they can relate to because they are also flawed but are open to change.”

It also gives the actors some creative liberty, a luxury unavailable to an actor portraying Jesus.

“You can interpret a lot of your parts as an actor,” said Shiloh Tatar, who plays Jesus in this year’s play. “But when you are playing Jesus, that is a role straight from the Bible so your portrayal needs to be bang on.”

Tatar, who took drama in high school, works as a mortgage broker and an Uber driver. He and the other actors, most of whom attend the church, manage to fit practice three times a week into their schedules.

“When Arthur approached me about playing Jesus, I really had to think and pray on it, but it has been such an honour. It is humbling,” said Tatar.

The New Passion Play has five performances from Good Friday to Easter Sunday. About 15,000 people are expected to attend.

“It’s a tradition for families,” said Wachnik. “Buses come in from all over southwestern Ontario to see our play. We always hear such positive feedback — people are really touched by it. That’s why we continue to do it.”

Tickets are available for \$5 at the website cpacentre.org.

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