

# 'Much Different Than Last Year:' St. Mary's Catholic Church Culminates Easter Celebration With Baptisms, Confirmations

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April 5 2021 10:33 AM





ALTON - One of the favorite times of the year for Rev. Jeremy Paulin, OMV, pastor at St. Mary's Catholic Church, is Easter Week.

This past week's Easter celebration began last Sunday with Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion and culminated with Mass on Saturday night and Sunday.

Father Paulin said what a difference this year was compared to last year with the COVID-19 Pandemic, when all the Holy Week Liturgies were attended by 10 people only, including 4 priests, a deacon and a religious brother.

"Last year on Palm Sunday we gave out palms and holy water on the street to over 500 parishioners, and although we live-streamed all our services on St. Mary's Facebook (and still do every day at 8:00 a.m.), it was just so strange. Yet at the same time, there was great joy in our being able to see our people. We'll never forget the tears and the smiles of the people as they began to come every Sunday for Holy Communion on the street until we were able to open the Church again for worship in June, to a limited yet sizable number of the flock. This year, on Palm Sunday, with probably the most people we have seen since before COVID-19, we recalled the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem."

Baptisms and confirmation were part of this year's St. Mary's Easter celebration.

At St. Mary's, three persons were baptized, three were received into the Church and seven were Confirmed and received their first Holy Communion, Paulin said.

Father Paulin also had this to say about Easter Week:

"We recalled the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem," he said. "He was acclaimed with loud Hosannas, shouts of praise and adulation, yet at the same time, he was well aware of the undercurrent of betrayal, that his arrest and death were imminent. The reading of the Passion account really sets the tone for Christians entering into the Sacred days that lie ahead this week. On Thursday - Holy Thursday - we remember and give thanks for the Last Supper and the Institution of the Holy Eucharist. On the night before he died, Jesus took bread and wine and prayed over them, transforming them into his own Body and Blood, and that he commanded his Apostles to do the same in his memory.

"In John's Gospel, where we are given the account of the washing of the feet of his disciples, we begin to understand more deeply how we are to live Christ's love in service to one another. Jesus is arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane and awaits the sham trial that lies ahead. Yet Jesus confided entirely in his Father. "Not my will, but yours be done." On Holy Thursday night, Christians watch and pray, as Jesus invited his disciples to do in the garden that very night. On Good Friday, Jesus was convicted and crucified. He died for our sins and the sins of the whole world.

"It was more his love of the Father and of you and I that he embraced the wood of the cross and endured the agony of Calvary. He thirsted - not merely for water but for all men and women, everywhere and ever. On Holy Saturday, we watch and wait and pray - with Faith. Jesus had promised he would rise on the third day - and so we wait, trusting in his promise. Holy Saturday Night is the night of nights - the holiest day of the year when we celebrate his resurrection and Easter joy! That he did rise as he said he would. At the great Easter Vigil Mass, with a new Paschal Candle, the darkness of the night is dissipated and made bright as day, symbolic of the light of the risen Christ, which we are all called to have and share by Baptism."

Father Paulin continued: "It's a night and then a day of great joy! Alleluia! The Easter Season lasts for fifty days and is the longest season in the Christian Calendar, an indication of its meaning and glory - that we are an Easter People - that we have been redeemed at a great price. We are forgiven and are called to live in gratitude to God for his having delivered us from sin and death. Alleluia! Holy Week began last Sunday with the celebration of Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion.

"He was acclaimed with loud Hosannas, shouts of praise and adulation, yet at the same time he was well aware of the undercurrent of betrayal, that his arrest and death were

imminent. The reading of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and Passion account really set the tone for all Christians entering into the Sacred days that lay ahead this week, and help us to see our own fragility and need for Christ and his mercy."

Rev. Paulin said on Thursday - Holy Thursday - "we remembered and gave thanks for the Last Supper and the Institution of the Holy Eucharist."

"On the night before he died, Jesus took bread and wine and prayed over them, transforming them into his own Body and Blood, and then he commanded his Apostles to do the same in his memory," Paulin said. "In John's Gospel, we are also given the account of the washing of the feet of his disciples, we begin to understand more deeply how we are to live Christ's love in service to one another. Last year on Holy Thursday, we were not able to imitate Jesus in the washing of men's feet and this year we were. Yet still, in the past year, perhaps we were all given more opportunities than ever to be patient and understanding of each other and to serve...all in ways we would never have imagined.

"On Holy Thursday night, Christians watch and pray, as Jesus invited his disciples to do in the garden that very night, and we recalled Jesus sweating blood in his agony in the garden, confiding entirely in his Father: "Not my will, but yours be done."

On Good Friday, Jesus was crucified and he died for our sins and the sins of the whole world," Rev. Paulin said.

"It was more his love of the Father and of you and me that he embraced the wood of the cross and endured the agony of Calvary," he said. "He thirsted - not merely for water but for all men and women, everywhere and at every time. How much more profoundly did we all have to say to our Heavenly Father in this past year, "Your will be done?" So much was (and always is) beyond our power. Holy Saturday Night is the night of nights - the holiest day of the year when we celebrate Christ's Resurrection and Easter Joy! Jesus did rise as he said he would!

"Our Savior is triumphant, defeating sin and death, and indeed opening the gates of Paradise for Dismas the repentant thief and for us all who will follow him! At the great Easter Vigil Mass, with a new Paschal Candle, the darkness of the night is dissipated and made bright as day, symbolic of the light of the risen Christ, which we are all called to have and share by Baptism. It's a night and then a day of great joy! Sunday! Easter! Alleluia!"

Rev. Paulin closed by saying: "We are loved, forgiven and are called to live in gratitude to God for his having delivered us from sin and death. Alleluia!"







