

On the Road to Sainthood

“The Paschal Vigil is the center and goal of our liturgy. We live for this night.” (“La Vigilia Pascual es centro y meta de nuestra liturgia. Vivimos para esa Noche.”) With these words, Blessed Carlos Manuel Rodríguez Santiago (1918–1963) expressed his great passion for liturgy, for the Paschal Mystery, and for the Risen Christ.



Carlos Manuel (“Chali” to his friends) worked as a clerk in an office. He was chronically ill. He never finished his education. He died young. Yet he shared his faith. He founded several religious publications. He taught religion, counseled, and wrote. He touched so many lives so generously that in 2001 he was declared Blessed, the third step on the road to sainthood. He is the first Puerto Rican to be accorded this honor.

Chali was part of the Liturgical Movement of the early twentieth century. He worked hard to bring the liturgy to the people, and the people to the liturgy. Even before the Second Vatican Council, the reform of the liturgy was underway. It began with Holy Week. In 1951 Pope Pius XII restored the Easter Vigil to its ancient splendor as a night service welcoming the Resurrection. Later (in 1955) he restored the rest of the Holy Week liturgies. Chali conveyed the meaning of these liturgies to ordinary parishioners, so they could come to know and love them. As Holy Week begins, it is good to remember how much we all owe to people like him.

HOLY WEEK BEGINS

With Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord, another Holy Week begins. The churches are arrayed in red, the color of martyrs. They fill to overflowing with people and palm branches. Today we remember the Lord’s triumphant entry into Jerusalem and his journey to the Cross for our salvation.

Throughout this Holy Week we will continue to meditate on the Passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Easter Triduum (which begins with the Mass of the Lord’s Supper on Holy Thursday, and continues through Vespers on Easter Sunday evening) is the center of the whole church year.

Of course, we remember the saving death and resurrection of Jesus all year long, whenever we celebrate the Eucharist. But our annual celebration of the Paschal Mystery—Christ’s Passover—helps us to see just what he accomplished. Satan is defeated. Death has no more power over us. We have been given a new life.

The high point of the Triduum is the Easter Vigil. This is the night when Christ rose from the dead. It is our Passover feast. This is when we baptize and confirm and bring new members to the table. This is when we sing the alleluia, silent all Lent. This is when the feast of Easter begins. The Masses of Easter Sunday overflow with the joy we first taste at the Vigil.

THREE DAYS OF WONDER

Throughout Lent, through the *Living the Eucharist* program, we have been reflecting on Sunday Mass. During this Holy Week, a time of devout recollection, prayer, and liturgical celebration, we have the opportunity to delve into the mystery of the Eucharist with the whole Church.

On Holy Thursday, we meditate on how Jesus instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper. We also experience gratitude for the priesthood, established at this meal. The washing of the feet, in memory of Jesus' own act of humble service, gives us a chance to reflect on how we serve others. The emblem of eucharistic living is how we care for the lowest and the least.

On Good Friday, the reading of the Passion and the veneration of the Cross invite us to see the depth of God's love for us, poured out in Jesus. He loved us even unto death. This is the love celebrated in the Eucharist. The salvation Christ won for us on the Cross is at the heart of the Mass.

Finally, in the Easter Vigil, we recall the story of our salvation, from creation to resurrection. When the elect are baptized, confirmed, and brought to the Eucharist, we see in the Eucharist the crowning glory of Christian initiation. Eucharist is the sacrament of who we are in Christ.

WHAT CHANGES?

Our Catholic understanding of the Eucharist is centered on the change that comes upon the bread and wine as they become the Body and Blood of Christ. This change is real, awe-inspiring, and important. Yet, when we open ourselves to the power of the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist, the change or transformation that takes place there goes beyond what happens to the bread and wine. Something also happens to those who participate.

We change. Participation in the Eucharist makes us into the Body and Blood of Christ, so that we may be poured out and given for the life of the world. The Church is called to share in the mission of Christ and the Holy Spirit. Like Carlos Manuel, we are called to share Christ's light with others. Like a ripple-effect, the gift of God's saving love flows from the Eucharist, through us, to those we encounter in the world.

REFLECT

The Passion of Christ was redemptive suffering.

When we join our sufferings with his, they too can become part of the mystery of God's love. Ask yourself: Where do I experience suffering in my life?

Can I offer my pain to God, joined to the faithful suffering of Jesus?

ACT

Attend all three of the Triduum liturgies this year, if you can. The Mass of the Lord's Supper, the Celebration of the Lord's Passion, and the Easter Vigil are actually one great liturgy spread out over three days. Treat yourself to the full experience.

PRAY

Lord Jesus, by dying on the Cross and rising to new life, you brought hope to the world. Help us hold fast to that hope. By your willingness to suffer for us, you showed us the meaning of love. Help us to love as you love. Through your gift of the Eucharist, you nourish our faith. Grant us the joy of sharing that faith with others.

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