

Holy Week 101

Contributed by Julie Blum

There are many things about Holy Week that we take for granted as Christians, things we assume everyone knows. However, if you are an outsider looking in you would probably think Holy Week to be odd, confusing and full of mystery. To quote Flannery O'Connor, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you odd." However, there are even things that insiders don't fully understand. With that in mind, here are just a few reminders for you.

You may be confused by the title 'Maundy Thursday.' Many think we are saying "Monday Thursday," which just adds to the confusion. Some people assume that this day is only a remembrance of the institution of the Lord's Supper, however much more happened that day. For example, Jesus gave his disciples an important commandment on that sacred night. Jesus said: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another" (John 13: 34.) In Latin, the word used for "commandment" is *mandatum*, where we get the English word "mandate." Throughout the years this led to "Maundy Thursday" or "Commandment Thursday" as a reminder of the commandment Jesus gave that day. Maundy Thursday is also known as "Holy Thursday", "Great and Holy Thursday", and "Thursday of Mysteries"

Another title that confuses people is "Good Friday." Why would we call the day Jesus was killed "good," so the question goes? Good Friday is also called Holy Friday, Black Friday, or Great Friday. The original name of this day was probably "God's Friday" but morphed over the years. In Germany it is called Karfreitag. The Kar part is an obsolete word, the ancestor of the English word 'care' in the sense of cares and woes, and it meant 'mourning.' So in German, it is 'Mourning Friday.'

One of the best theological reasons I have heard for the name of this day comes from a Seattle P.I. article by Anthony B. Robinson. He writes, "Why is Good Friday called 'Good?'" Perhaps because on that day, and in this story, God stands with the forsaken, the victims, the abandoned and the despised. More than that, God is one of them, is one of us. In our hearts, our deepest fear may be just this, that we shall be forsaken, abandoned, despised and rejected. And sometimes these fears lead us to do terrible things...if God is among the forsaken and rejected, then they, then we, are never wholly abandoned, never truly forsaken. Which may be reason enough for calling this Friday "good."

Here are some other terms you might have had that are associated with Holy Week. "Triduum" is a word that means "three days" and refers to the three days of intense observance of the paschal mystery. It begins with Maundy Thursday evening and concludes Easter evening. "Paschal" is from the Greek 'pascha' meaning "Passover," from the Aramaic 'pasha' meaning "pass over," and corresponding to Hebrew 'pesah,' from 'pasah' meaning "to pass over." Pasche was an early term for "Easter." Easter is often seen as a more secular term for the holiday with the more Christian term being "Resurrection Sunday."

Blessed Holy Week, Pastor Julie Blum