

The Fifty Days of Easter

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We read in the *Norms Governing Liturgical Calendars* that “the fifty days from Easter to Pentecost are celebrated in joyful exultation as one feast day, or better as one “great Sunday” (art. 22). Fifty days is a long time when we consider the sound-bite, keep-it-short attitude a good number of us experience in our daily life. This holy time following the feast of Easter should give us the opportunity to reflect on the ritual aspects that marked our observance of Holy Week and the culminating rites celebrated during the solemn Easter Vigil Mass.

In the early centuries of Christian history, great homiletic texts preached by the bishop of a territorial area provided a commentary on the ritual elements that comprised the celebration of the Easter Triduum (three days), and more importantly the mother of all liturgies, the Easter vigil. These came to be known as the great mystagogical homilies.

Those who have walked the journey of faith as catechumens and candidates for full communion with the Catholic Church and now share fully with us at the Lord’s table know this post-Easter time as the period of *mystagogia*. The word *mystagogia* refers to the mysteries of faith that were celebrated in the ritual of the Easter Vigil. Essentially, the “mysteries” are the core beliefs of the Catholic Christian faith that were ritualized during the solemn Easter Vigil; the premiere belief being the redemption brought about by Christ’s passing over from death to life.

We witnessed this very fact at the inception of the solemn vigil with the blessing of the Easter fire and the Easter candle. We heard this story of redemption in the selection of biblical readings from the very beginning of creation and how God’s love for humankind was never abandoned. We felt the life-giving water of new birth sprinkled on our bodies and the joyous smile on the faces of those brought forth for baptism. We shared the sacred meal, our Lord’s Body and Blood, as the on-going legacy of sacrifice that the whole world might live. These are the “mysteries” of the Easter vigil and the spiritual food for our thoughts these 50 days.

Whether one has shared the joy of the Catholic Christian faith for a life-time, or simply a matter of several weeks, the days following Easter are intended to evoke a joyful time of reflection for us all – the people of God. Fifty days may be a long time for many of us, but let us not forget the journey that brought us to this time. Our fasting and charitable works for the previous 40 days has given way to the promise given by Jesus, the risen one.