



Diocesan Relations  
Office

# Catholic Pastoral Center

## Diocese of Brownsville

### ***News Release***

March 17, 2005

### **Holy Week starts this weekend with Palm Sunday**

Holy Week, the week from Palm Sunday (March 20) to Easter (March 27), is a week for Christians to commemorate the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. While on Ash Wednesday Christians begin their spiritual preparation for Easter; Holy Week marks the final phase of that preparation.

Catholics throughout the Valley will commemorate the week by participating in the following rituals and traditions at their parishes. (There are 65 parishes in the Diocese of Brownsville, which includes the counties of Cameron, Hidalgo, Willacy and Starr.)

#### **Palm Sunday – March 20, 2005**

On Palm Sunday, which falls on March 20 of this year, palm branches are blessed and carried in procession to ritually reenact Jesus' triumphal entry in his own city of Jerusalem to complete his work of salvation by suffering, dying and rising again. As recorded in the Gospel, Jesus entered amidst shouts of an enthusiastic, welcoming crowd. "Hosanna to the Son of David, the King of Israel, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," they cried.

Many Christians throughout the world have prepared for this day, throughout the past five weeks of Lent, by prayer and works of charity and self-sacrifice as an act of spiritual renewal and penance for sin. On this same day, the Passion and death of Jesus are proclaimed as a reminder of how fickle and unfaithful the human heart can be, cheering "Hosanna" one minute and "Crucify Him" the next. This is the beginning of the holiest week for Christians. It is commonly referred to as "Holy Week."

As far back as the fifth century, Christians of Jerusalem used to gather in the early afternoon on the Mount of Olives to reflect on our Lord's life. Then, toward the evening, they would go in procession into Jerusalem, carrying palm or olive branches. This practice soon spread throughout the Churches in the East and the West. By the year 600, the name Palm Sunday was becoming common place.

The custom of blessing the “palm branches” occurred around the middle of the eighth century. Since palm and olive branches were not available in many parts of the world, other items were used in their absence. For example, in Germany, willow branches were used. Other places used green and blossoming branches of various trees.

Palm branches historically symbolized life, hope and victory. However, popular belief also attributed great power and even magical effects to them. Among the pagan Greeks and Romans, branches of certain trees were believed to ward off evil spirits and protect houses, farms and pastures from such spirits. Today, the blessing of palms represents a form of intercession for God’s help against the many threats to human existence and salvation. Blessed or consecrated objects are symbols; they express and stimulate faith, hope and love. They do not possess magical power.

Today, palms received on Palm Sunday are a reminder of Christ’s triumphant entry into Jerusalem and his death and resurrection. After Palm Sunday, it has become tradition to display them, often braided or woven into some artistic form along with a crucifix or sacred picture. On the following Ash Wednesday, they may be burned into ashes and used for the beginning of Lent.

## **Holy Week**

Special services for Holy Thursday, Good Friday and the Easter Vigil are planned at Catholic Churches throughout the Diocese. The last three days of Holy Week, which occur on March 24, 25, and 26 of this year, are essentially one unified celebration of Christ’s death and resurrection broken into three parts. Traditionally, they are known as “the Tridium,” meaning the three days.

### **Holy Thursday – March 24, 2005**

On Holy Thursday, the faithful celebrate the first Eucharistic banquet – the Lord’s Supper, when Jesus gathered his disciples the night before he was to die. This is the first time he gave them his body to eat and his blood to drink, saying “Do this in memory of me.” Jesus then washed their feet as an example of the attitude of humble service he requires of his followers.

Remembering the institution of the Holy Eucharist is the heart of the Holy Thursday observance. Also, a ceremonial washing of the feet by the priest is part of the Mass of the Lord’s Supper on Holy Thursday evening. This ritual imitates Jesus’ Last Supper action of humility and service. Generally 12 participants from the parish are chosen for the symbolic washing of feet, which reminds Christians that generous, humble service is a vital part of what it means to follow Jesus.

### **Good Friday – March 25, 2005**

On Good Friday, the Church focuses on Jesus’ passion and death. It is the anniversary of the death of Jesus on the cross. As a sign of mourning, no Masses are celebrated on Good Friday. Instead, Catholics gather for a special service. The cross, the most powerful of all signs of Jesus’ love for humanity and of salvation, dominates this liturgy. As a crucifix is carried in solemn procession, the priest or deacon sings, “Behold the wood of the cross, on which hung the Savior of the world,” and the people respond, “come, let us worship.” Then the faithful approach the cross one at a time to show their devotion, usually by a kiss.

### **Stations of the Cross**

On Good Friday, many parishes also lead a prayer of the Stations of the Cross. Also known as the Way of the Cross, *Via Crucis*, and *Via Dolorosa*, the fourteen stations draw the faithful into prayerful reflection on Jesus' journey through the streets of Jerusalem, weighed down by his cross, to the mount of Calvary outside the city gates, where he was crucified.

In addition, some parishes sponsor *las Siete Palabras* (the seven words), which include readings and reflections based on the last seven words made by Jesus Christ before dying on the cross; and "*Pésame a la Virgen Maria*" (Condolences to the Virgin Mary), scripture readings reflecting on the death of Jesus and Mary's suffering, followed by the praying of the Rosary.

### **Easter Vigil – Saturday, March 26, 2005**

Holy Saturday night is the Easter Vigil, when the church celebrates what is called the Paschal Mystery. The celebration takes its name from the Jewish Pasch, or "Passover." This Pasch speaks of the Jew's Passover from slavery in Egypt, through the water of the Red Sea (or "Reed Sea") into the desert and eventually into the Promised Land. For Christians, it was a proto-type of the Passover of Jesus who "Passed Over" from this life, through death, into the glory of his risen life and our own Passover from the slavery of sin to new life, merited by Christ's Passion and cross.

The Church has from ancient times regarded the Easter Vigil as the most solemn of all her celebrations. New members are baptized on this night because for Christians, baptism represents the "passing over" from death in sin to new life in the risen Christ. In similar fashion, all the members of the Church recall their own baptism on this night and renew their baptismal promise to faithfully follow Christ.

On this night the stories of salvation, recorded in Scripture, are told again in all the ritual elements of the Easter Vigil – the chants and singing, the lighting of the new fire, the flowing waters of baptism, the rich perfumes of the anointing of oil, the blessing and sharing of the Body and the Blood of Christ.

### **Easter Sunday – March 27, 2005**

The theme for Easter morning Mass echoes that of the Easter Vigil. It remembers and celebrates the very foundation of Christianity: Jesus is raised from the dead and is Lord. This Mass features joyful resurrection songs, a renewal of baptismal vows, a sprinkling of the congregation with new Easter water, and joyful decorations of Easter lilies.

Easter Sunday is the first Sunday of the Easter season, which continues for 50 days, from Easter to Pentecost.

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