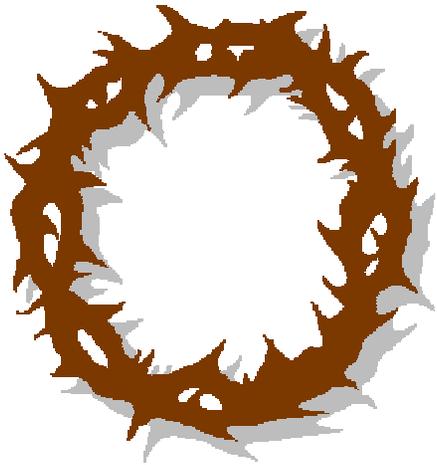


Understanding Good Friday



**Saint Francis of Assisi
Roman Catholic
Church**

Kitchener, Ontario

GOOD FRIDAY:

As dawn breaks upon our world on this day the Church is still cast in darkness and silence. The prayers we use this day are prayers of seeking – where has our Christ gone? Why does he have to suffer and die? How can we survive without him? Has our God abandoned us? Why have you forsaken us? What does it all mean?

Today the Church does not celebrate “Mass”, we are not permitted to do so. The services on this day are called **The Celebration of the Lord's Passion**. In our mourning of the passion of Jesus today, which the services focus upon, we join with people of faith around the world as we share in a day of universal fasting and abstinence. Here at Saint Francis we will have two Good Friday Services (remember they are not Masses) one at 11:00 am and the second at 3:00 pm. While both services are structured in the same way, the 11:00 am service will be an edited version in that it will be designed more for our younger members, our children and teens. The service will use words, prayers and actions that are adapted so that children will be able to better understand, and will not be unnecessarily traumatized by the violent nature of the passion and death of Christ. Adults would be better served spiritually by attending the 3:00 pm service, and they are strongly encouraged to do so (parents of course should attend the 11:00 am service with their children so that they can emotionally support their children as needed, and perhaps explain what is happening in ways your children will better understand).

During both Good Friday services four things of importance to our spiritual lives will take place: prostration; liturgy of the Word; reception of Eucharist; and the veneration of the cross.

The first ritual action, the **Prostration**, takes place in silence. Those in the gathering procession move to the front of the church and kneel – the Presider will lay prostrate on the floor before the altar – everyone in the church will kneel. No words are spoken, nor is any music sung or played. This action is intended to remind us of a number of things: one, that we are helpless before the cross of Christ, the instrument of his death; two, that we are filled with wonder, awe and reverence for a God that would love us so much; and three, that we are sinners in need of God's healing grace. While this action is brief, it provides the gathered community with the opportunity to prepare themselves for the drama that is about to unfold, to clear our minds of all distractions and focus completely upon the death of Christ on the cross.

We now move into the **Liturgy of the Word**. The Prophet Isaiah reminds us that the servant of God would come, would die for us, and would carry the weight of our sins. Psalm 31 will speak to us about placing our hope and trust in God. The Letter to the Hebrews will proclaim Christ as our high priest. Then, perhaps the most powerful of all scripture accounts, the Passion of Our Lord. In the passion account we will hear, see and feel the dramatic events of Christ's death as they unfold before us in the spoken word. The passion proclamation will be a little different this year for it will also include the proclamation of the birth of Christ. This combining of the accounts of Jesus' birth and passion remind us that the birth and death of Jesus are intimately linked to each other, his birth foretells his death. One of the gifts the Magi brought to the baby Jesus was the oil that was to be used to anoint the body at the time of death.

The liturgy of the word will then conclude with the prayers of intercession – the exact same prayers of

intercession will be used in every Roman Catholic Church in the world.

The next ritual action will be the **Reception of Eucharist**. The Eucharist received on this day was consecrated the day before at the Holy Thursday Mass. The reception of Eucharist is very simple: Our Father (no sign of peace today), Lamb of God, and then reception. (Only the Bread of Life is received, no consecrated Blood is distributed).

Finally comes the climax of Good Friday, the **Veneration of the Cross**. We cast our eyes upon this cross and we see two things: one, an instrument of violence and death; and two, a symbol of life. The cross has no corpus upon it, for it is the wood of the cross we are asked to venerate, the very wood upon which Christ died in order to bring us new and everlasting life. The gathered community is invited to come forward and claim the cross as their own. This is the cross we too are invited to carry as followers of Christ, for it is no longer Christ's cross alone, but it is also our cross. Yet we carry the cross knowing full well it can lead us to the Resurrection. When we venerate the cross by touch, or kiss, or hold, or bow to, or kneel before, or venerate in some other fashion, we say to the entire world that this instrument of death has no power over the Resurrection.

This is the last action of our Good Friday service. **Immediately** after venerating the cross people leave the church in complete and total silence, they do not return to their pew – there is no final blessing at the end of the service, for Christ has died, we are now to await the news of the Resurrection. The action of immediately leaving the church in silence reminds us that we are now a church in mourning, grieving the pain of Jesus' death.