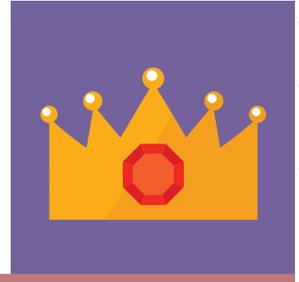
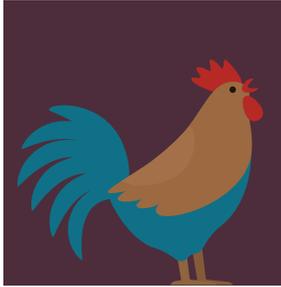




Holy Week

Vincent Sherlock, parish priest of Tubbercurry, Co Sligo writes about 'the seamless prayer that runs through Holy Week'. His article will be a 'prayer-backdrop' for the mystery of Holy Week.



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I often wondered about that seamless garment. They cast lots for it rather than tear it. This, we are told, fulfilled the scriptures. In its seamlessness, in its woven style, it speaks to us as we enter Holy Week about the seamless prayer that runs through these days and of a church united in prayer from the entry into Jerusalem to the exit from the tomb.

Palm Sunday, Spy Wednesday, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday may well represent

that seamless garment. The named days of Holy Week are found in every week but set apart by Palm, Spy, Holy, Good and Easter. They stand apart from and yet central to all the other weeks of the year. The days run through each week of the year but, for this week, they are marked through his presence, and they tell a sacred story.

On Palm Sunday, where are we in the crowd? Are we with the ones laying branches on the road, singing

Hosanna or are we watching from a distance? Are we moved or unmoved by his humble entry into the glory that was Jerusalem? Do we see the donkey and allow it to take us back to Bethlehem with Mary and Joseph entering an uncertain future on its back? Some call the donkey "The Beast of Burden" and maybe we might recognise in Christ now, the one who shoulders our burdens. Palm Sunday is not just about the "Long Gospel", it is about Palm, blessed, shared and taken to our homes. In taking home the Palm, we are taking home the message, allowing it to enter our personal Jerusalem where we can give thanks that he has come to our town, our home and our heart.

Spy Wednesday is an important part of this seamless garment because it speaks to that less than wholesome characteristic where we negatively watch people. Spy Wednesday reminds us of what it means not to be holy. It speaks to us of how, through spitefulness, we can relate to others and watch them with a view to catching them out. Jimmy McCarthy has a song called "The Carrier of Scandal" and its lyrics are all too familiar: "The first to arrive, the last to go, the last you'd tell and the first to know – the carrier of scandal". Spy Wednesday reminds us that as we watch we can be watched, that as we look for ways to catch others out, all too easily it can happen to ourselves. It is a timely reminder to "treat others as we would like them to treat us".

Holy Thursday with its Chrism Mass is about gathering people – the



people of a diocese – to celebrate priesthood, the gift of the sacraments, the blessing and consecration of the Sacred Oils, the renewal of a promise – of commitment to priesthood and ministry.

That ministry and commitment are taken back to the parishes of the diocese where people gather to celebrate the Mass of The Lord's Supper – the institution of The Eucharist - later that same day. The seamlessness of the prayer comes to the fore when the priest calls people to pray in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Gloria is prayed to the sound of a ringing bell and the Mass ends without blessing or music. This reminds us that three days of prayer have begun and that the prayers, like these days, run in and out of each other. There are some key moments in this Holy Thursday gathering. The washing of the feet, reminds us of a church called to serve and to tend to its people. It is a reminder that Christ came to serve and saw that service through without compromise. The Altar is stripped of its cloth, candles are quenched,



the Tabernacle door is left open to display the emptiness within. An Altar of Repose takes us to Jesus' Gethsemane where we can stay awake and watch for one hour. We enter a time of accompaniment where we journey from the courtroom, the courtyard and its fire, to Calvary – along the "Way of The Cross" where we meet those he met, hear the words he spoke and allow our hearts to burn within "as he explains the scriptures."

Good Friday gathers us at 3.00pm to continue the prayer. The silent entrance to the church is a continuation of the silent exit the night before. We listen again to the Gospel account of those days and hear Pilate's question "Truth, what is that?" and know that he knew the truth but was afraid to respond to it. We are invited to welcome the truth into our lives and to be guided by it always. With Simon, even reluctantly, we shoulder the cross. With John we hear the invitation to accept Mary as our mother and to take her to our homes. We hear Jesus cry out to us afresh: "I am thirsty" and know that this thirst is not

quenched by vinegar but through our realising to whom all this is happening. With the "good thief" we seek forgiveness and with the soldier at the foot of the cross, we recognise Jesus again, as "A son of God". The veil of the temple, torn in two, unlike the seamless garment, reminds us that there are no more barriers between us and God, the Sanctuary is thrown open and we see all that is to be seen. We come with Joseph of Arimathea to do the decent thing, and, with the women of Jerusalem we notice where he has been buried. Why? Because it matters. All life, all death and all people matter.

In Holy Saturday's Vigil we come to "the wake" – we gather with family to remember, mourn, share, nourish and be strengthened. Just as the nighttime wake in the house sees the coming of dawn so the Easter Fire, the blessing and lighting of the Paschal Candle, the sharing of its light through the darkened church and the singing of the Exsultet, the listening to the stories from the Old Testament all lead us to the Gloria where the bells ring again – the dawn has arrived. The Vigil, though shortened for practical reasons, is all about movement, about spending time, remembering, and coming to realise "he is not here, he is risen".

That takes us to Easter Sunday with its morning confusion, leading to hope and hope leading to recognition on that road to Emmaus that "the words of Scripture had to be fulfilled."

The garment was not torn. The Scriptures were fulfilled. Seamless. 