

Homilists explain Easter, Pentecost

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The New York Stock Exchange closes on Good Fridays, for religious and superstitious reasons. Major Christian denominations — Catholic, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, Anglican, [Episcopal](#) — observe Lent. On the day of Jesus Christ's death, the faithful refrain from the material, like Wall Street trading, and focus on the [spiritual](#). Pointless to open the Big Board since there isn't much business. The last time the markets opened on Good Friday was 104 years ago, when they saw one of two huge crashes that made up the Panic of 1907, Bloomberg reports. Fear of repeating the catastrophe keeps traders home.

[Filipinos](#) have weirder Good Friday superstitions. Wearing red supposedly brings bad luck. Warays believe the red apparel would turn into the wearer's skin. The holyday supposedly is best to reenergize amulets. The charms stealthily are dipped into the [holy water](#) font by the church door. In Southern Tagalog, talisman holders would gather at an exclusive field on what the Evangelists referred to as the ninth hour, three o'clock in the afternoon, when Christ expired on the Cross. Before the select group they test special skills: levitation, x-ray vision, invisibility, and invulnerability to blade or bullet. Rites to acquire such powers are grotesque. A black cat is slaughtered and buried at a crossroad on a Good Friday, then dug up the following year to get the magical stone, all accompanied by Latin chants.

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In old religions, believers offered sacrifices to the gods. To Christians it's God who sacrifices. The ultimate was to be born human and crucified, to redeem man from sin. Good Friday is occasion for Christians to recollect and atone for wrongs. Some self-flagellate or mimic the carrying of the cross and crucifixion, which hierarchs frown on for bordering on the sacrilegious. Prescribed instead is penitence by reflection on Christ's sacrificial suffering and death.

Christians are told in turn to submit humbly to God. [Theologian](#) Tommy Lane likes to tell about the church in Vienna where the former ruling Hapsburgs of Austria are buried. During royal funerals the cortege of mourners knocked on the [church door](#) to be allowed in. The abbot inside would ask, "Who is it that desires [admission](#) here?" A procession guard would call out, "His apostolic majesty, the emperor." The abbot would answer, "I don't know him." They would knock a second time, and again the abbot would ask who was there. The guard outside would announce, "The highest emperor." Anew the abbot would say, "I don't know him." A third time they would knock, and the abbot would ask, "Who is it?" The third time, the answer would be, "A poor sinner, your brother."

After the Good Friday mourning follows the Easter celebration. Christ's resurrection from the dead not only proves his divinity but also stresses the Creator's plan for all: afterlife. Christians believe in, but find hard to imagine, a final judgment and life everlasting with God. Fr. Jack McArdle of Dublin tries to explain it with the story of the grub becoming a dragonfly: "At the bottom of the pond little grubs were crawling about. They wonder what happens to their members who climb up the stem of the lily and never come back. What's it like up there? They agree among themselves that the next one called to the surface will come back. A little grub finds itself drawn to the surface by nature, and crawls up the stem onto the lily leaf. It was bright up there; they won't believe this; it had been so dark and murky down below. Then something wondrous occurs. The grub spreads out two huge colored wings and becomes a beautiful dragonfly. It never imagined this to happen. It thought it would remain a grub forever. It flew back and forth across the pond. It could see the other grubs at the bottom, but they couldn't see it. It realized there was no way it could get back, and that they could not recognize such a magnificent creature as ever having been one of them."

After Easter comes **Pentecost**. The **Holy Spirit** descended on the Apostles and gave them the gift of tongues. They came to speak different languages, and thence spread Christ's message of love. In a compilation of homilies Fr. Lane recounts two incidents of speaking in tongues. In the first the members of a charismatic prayer meeting had called for the Holy Spirit's presence. At one point a woman gave a powerful utterance. Later Cardinal Tomas O'Fiaich's secretary, a nun who had once ministered in Africa, told them that the woman recited parts of the litany of Loreto in Swahili. She had repeated the phrase "Mary is Queen of Peace" over and over. The second is from another charismatic gathering in Rome. A man from another country who didn't know Irish (Gaelic) spoke so in prayer.

Amazing too is the story of Stanley Villavicencio, a Cebuano devotee of the Sacred Heart. Deeply religious, he led neighbors in daily **prayer** and building a chapel. One day he suddenly fell to the ground convulsing and vomiting blood. At the hospital ICU doctors could not diagnose what was wrong and soon declared him brain dead. Three days later, as his wife and family were preparing him for burial, he got up fully healed. Cardinal Ricardo Vidal investigated the report, and cleared Stanley to retell his story. One time he was brought to England to narrate his "death" — in Visayan, but heard in English. (Read more about it in <http://our.homewithgod.com/divinemeracy/miracles/>)

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