

Semana Santa [Holy Week] in The Philippines



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In this predominantly **Roman Catholic** nation, Holy Week, known as both **Semana Santa** or **Mahal na Araw**, is considered as one of the most important religious festivals of the entire year. Many **superstitions** abound regarding this holiest of weeks, such as that wounds inflicted or received on **Good Friday** take long to heal and that amulets acquired on the said day are especially powerful.

Throughout the week, most establishments either shut down operations until Black Saturday or have later opening and earlier closing times, and (mostly local) **television** stations either stay off the air and those that sign-on air shows with more solemn or serious content, especially films and programmes with a religious theme. An example is the airing of the **Seven Last Words** on Good Friday live from churches on various local channels and films about the life and death of **Jesus**. During the **Easter Triduum**, usually a **public holiday**, some television stations even interrupt broadcast altogether until **Black Saturday** in observance of this solemn occasion. In the Ilocos Region, a common practice is the singing of a wailing song called the Leccio. It is done as a reflection of mourning the death of Christ.

Domingo de Ramos [Palm Sunday]

At **Mass** on **Palm Sunday**, Catholics carry palm fronds to be blessed by the **priest**. Many **Filipinos** bring them home after the **Mass** and place them above their front doors or windows, in the belief that doing so can ward off evil spirits and avert lightning. The usual **Gospel** reading on Palm Sunday features Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem, when he was welcomed by people waving palm fronds and laying their cloaks on the ground for his donkey to walk upon.

Holy Monday to Holy Wednesday [Lunes Santo a Miercoles Santo]

Holy Monday marks the beginning of the Pabasa (literally, "reading") or the **Pasyon**, the marathon chanting of the poetic prayer-story of **Jesus'** life, **Passion**, and death, which continues day and night, for as long as two straight days.

Jueves Santo [Holy Thursday]

Come **Holy Thursday** or Jueves Santo, a popular tradition is "Church Visit", which involves visiting a church or several churches at which the faithful would pray the devotion known as the **Stations of the Cross**. Celebrated on this day is the last Mass before **Easter**, usually including a reenactment of the **Washing of the Feet** of the **Apostles**; this Mass is followed by the procession of the **Blessed Sacrament** before it is taken to the **Altar of Repose**. **TV** and **Radio** networks in the nation have formally either sign-off until **Easter Sunday** or started restricting broadcasts related to **religion**, especially to the Holy Week.

Viernes Santo [Good Friday]

Good Friday or Viernes santo, a **public holiday** in the Philippines, is commemorated with solemn street **processions**, the **Way of the Cross**, the commemoration of Jesus' **Seven last words** and a Passion play called the **Senaculo**. In some communities (most famously in the province of **Pampanga**), the processions include devotees who self- **flagellate** and sometimes even **have themselves nailed to crosses** as expressions of penance or in fulfillment of a vow accomplished in thanksgiving or exchange for a granted request or prayer. After three o'clock in the afternoon of Good Friday (the time at which Jesus is traditionally believed to have died), noise is discouraged, bathing is proscribed and the faithful are urged to keep a

solemn and prayerful disposition. Towards late afternoon and evening there is the procession of the dead Christ. The figure of the corpse of Jesus is taken in solemn procession and borne on a decorated **hearse**, after which it is venerated by the faithful. Some even accord the image with the proper funeral rites such as **laying the body in state** or, in some instances, by smoking the seated corpse of Jesus over a fire in accordance with local, pre-hispanic funerary customs. Such a procession may involve a various number of other saints, and tradition dictates that the last image in the line is the **Sorrowful Virgin**.

Sabado de Gloria [Black Saturday]

Black Saturday, as it is called in the country, is traditionally observed with silence and solemnity. Preparations are made for the **Easter Vigil** to be celebrated that evening.

Domingo de Pascua [Easter Sunday]

Easter morning is marked with joyous celebration, the first being the dawn ceremony called the Salubong ("meeting"), wherein statues of the **Resurrected Christ** and the **Virgin Mary**, along with other saints such as **St. Peter** and **Mary Magdalene**, are brought in procession together to meet, imagining the first reunion of Jesus and his mother Mary after the **Resurrection**. The statue of the Virgin Mary is **veiled in black**, showing her state of bereavement. A girl dressed as an **angel**, positioned on a specially constructed high platform/scaffold or suspended in mid-air, sings the **Regina Coeli** and then dramatically pulls the veil off of the image, signifying the end of her grieving. This is followed by pealing **bells** and **fireworks**, and the joyous **Easter Mass**.

Senaculo

Senaculo or the Passion play is a **dramatic presentation** depicting the **Passion of Christ**: the **trial**, **suffering** and **death** of **Jesus Christ**. It is a traditional part of **Lent** in several **Christian** denominations, particularly in **Catholic** tradition.

The **Philippines**, being one of two predominantly Christian nations in the whole of Asia (**East Timor** being the other), has Passion plays called Senakulo, named after the **Upper room**, or Cenacle. Companies perform the Senakulo during Holy Week. Also, there are actual crucifixions done by people outside of Passion plays to fulfill a panata (for a request or prayer granted), in Barangay **San Pedro Cutud**, **City of San Fernando**, **Pampanga** being a popular place to see this.

