



Intercultural Celebrations from Ash Wednesday through Pentecost

The Church provides many opportunities for strengthening the intercultural aspects of liturgical life in each parish throughout the year, including from Ash Wednesday until the feast of Pentecost. Take those opportunities, and the rewards are likely to be immeasurable.

The Ash Wednesday liturgy is usually well attended, and pastoral considerations determine the type of celebration needed. An evening liturgy, allowing entire families to be present together, is easily accessible to Hispanic, Filipino, and Vietnamese parishioners, for example. Likewise, liturgies celebrated in a group's native language allow the music, homily, and symbols of the season to prepare all to enter into the spirit of Lent.

During Lent, parishioners might gather weekly in small language groups to read and share the Scriptures for the upcoming Sunday. Some parishes offer a series of talks on a Lenten theme or parish mission. These could be done in the dominant language of the community or in more languages if there can be separate meeting spaces on the same evening. Penance services may also be planned that include hymns and prayers in several languages, with confessors available to assist the speakers of those languages.

It's often easy to celebrate the diversity in a parish through something as simple as a soup supper, fish fry, or pancake dinner. Gatherings like these provide parish communities with the valuable chance to share a family meal together. Another fun alternative involves the Ukrainian art of decorating eggs. Called *pysanky*, it focuses on the Christian symbolism of Easter. Classes may be offered during Lent for novices and even experts in this craft. The resulting creations add to any parish celebration of the season.

Another valuable time to encourage inclusion at worship is during Lenten and Triduum pilgrimages and processions. A day of reflection at a nearby shrine, abbey, or retreat center allows everyone to spend time

away on holy ground, while processions form a natural part of the liturgical celebrations of the Triduum. After Mass on Thursday at one Polish parish I know, clergy, children carrying lilies, and representatives of parish organizations process to the repository where the Blessed Sacrament is placed. People pray there and then visit area churches. The liturgy on Good Friday includes a procession of the faithful, and each person individually venerates the cross.

Las Tres Caídas (The Three Times Jesus Falls) and the *Pésame* (Condolences to Mary) are part of the Good Friday observance in many Latino communities, and incorporating these into any parish community with a large Hispanic population is a good idea. The devotion of the Seven Last Words of Jesus on the Cross (*Las Siete Palabras*) is another way Latinos and others spend time with the suffering Lord. The prayers and preaching may be led by representatives of various cultural groups. In some Polish churches, for example, leaders of parish organizations share reflections on the five wounds of Christ in front of a tomb containing a statue of Jesus' body.

Latino and Filipino communities participate in the *Procesión del Santo Entierro* (Procession of the Holy Burial) at night following Good Friday services. A glass casket encasing a reclining statue of Christ is carried through the streets and displayed in the church as an expression of respect for the body of Christ before burial. The *pasyon* tradition, which calls for the chanting of the Passion, is a vow (*panata*) made by an individual or family and is often passed on from generation to generation.

On Saturday of the Triduum, the Eastern European Blessing of Easter Foods, which will be served by family members, might be expanded to include all in a parish. Afterwards, families can pray in the church where Christ's body remains. Some Lithuanians sign up to spend an hour with Jesus (a statue of his body lies on a slab in the church) sometime between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m.

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At the Easter Vigil, new members are baptized, confirmed, or received into the Church, so this is a wonderful time to bring together a parish’s many cultures. This celebration, rich in images of water and light, may not be well attended by members of some communities since it is not always a part of their tradition. So be sure to encourage everyone to attend.

On Easter Sunday, *rezurekcja*, the pre-dawn Easter Mass at some Polish and Lithuanian parishes, includes a procession with the Blessed Sacrament and a statue of the risen Christ followed by prayer at the empty tomb. The *Gran Encuentro* (Grand Encounter) is observed in many Latino communities. In this tradition, women carry a statue of the Blessed Mother while men carry a statue of Jesus. Both groups meet near the church where the people genuflect and lower Mary’s statue, reflecting on the first time she met the risen Jesus. Singing and praying, they process into the church building together and begin the Easter liturgy. The Filipino celebration of *salubong* often starts at dawn in a similar way.

This season provides wonderful opportunities to encourage the entire parish to worship as one. Pentecost is an especially appropriate time to welcome all as the people of God. Consider having an entrance procession with representatives of different cultures in native dress, or try having one of the readings proclaimed in a language other than English. Print the intercessions in English but read them in other languages, and offer a variety of languages and styles in the music used at worship. Invite parishioners from several cultural groups to be greeters. Plan a gathering for after Mass where ethnic foods are served, and invite all to share in the banquet.

Here are a few more specific, yet simple, suggestions to keep in mind as you plan to celebrate the season. Consider them if you can; a unified parish is truly a wonderful thing.

- **Plan together.** When representatives of all parish groups are invited to plan liturgies, the result will often be more coordinated, prayerful celebrations. Since music is key, leaders of all language choirs should be encouraged to meet and offer suggestions regarding the musical selections. It’s also good to decide which choir will take the lead. If there is only one parish choir, plan to identify singers and musicians of all the language groups who might participate in the music ministry for these days and possibly into the future. This could lead to the formation of a permanent multicultural parish committee or choir.
 - **Communicate.** A bulletin invitation or pulpit announcement is usually a good way to start communicating, but it’s rarely enough. Parishioners may read or hear an announcement but, unless they’re approached repeatedly, they may assume the message isn’t sincere. Continuing education of leaders and those in the pews as to the true meaning of “catholic” is one way of helping each to receive the newcomer as brother or sister.
 - **Invite.** The personal approach when inviting cannot be understated. Having someone at the church door after Mass with fliers inviting others to the liturgy works well, for example. Daily Mass attendees may also take the time to personally encourage others to accompany them to a liturgy.
 - **Welcome.** A warm welcome to those attending an intercultural liturgy is very important. On Good Friday, Archbishop Donald Wuerl of Washington, DC, stands at the entrance of St. Matthew Cathedral to personally welcome the Hispanic community, who has just prayed the *Via Crucis* through the streets of the city, as they enter the cathedral to celebrate the liturgy in Spanish. The people feel his welcome to the mother church of the archdiocese in a big way. Consider doing something similar at your parish.
 - **Call forth gifts.** The liturgical celebrations during the Triduum should include ministers of many cultures. Musicians in particular may be invited to share their gifts by increasing their repertoire for service at the celebrations. Consider having them learn songs in various languages and songs that are sensitive to the needs of different cultures.
 - **Respect.** Some songs or customs may be new to members of a parish community, even those who speak the dominant language of the group. The gifts of each person and culture must be respected, understood, and honored. Whether by a written explanation in the worship aid or through a brief pre-celebration announcement by the pastor or a member of the parish staff, the purpose and content of each tradition could be explained and supported.
 - **Thank.** Showing gratitude to those who have shared their time and talent to make intercultural celebrations true moments of prayer helps everyone feel like a part of the one parish community. Thank people often and sincerely.
- In some immigrant communities, daily life is a constant struggle in a foreign land. The suffering of Jesus closely resembles their current situation, though they may not realize it. Making a significant effort to help *all* in a parish come to know God is possibly the most important work we can ever try to do. Slowly, we can all come to realize more fully that we are many individuals but only one body of Christ.

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Sister Doris Mary Turek serves as a multicultural specialist on the staff of the USCCB’s Secretariat on Divine Worship. A School Sister of Notre Dame of the Atlantic Midwest Province, she is founding director of the national office of the Instituto Nacional Hispano de Liturgia.