

## Staying up with Jesus: A new, yet ancient, tradition.

Holy Thursday is the feast that marks the end of Lent and the beginning of the Holy Triduum, which also includes Good Friday, Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday.

At the end of the Holy Thursday Mass, the Eucharist, preserved for use on Good Friday, is placed on a temporary “altar of repose” away from the sanctuary. It is customary for the faithful to process together to this altar and spend time in quiet prayer and adoration. In the Roman Missal (the book containing the prescribed prayers, chants, and instructions for the celebration of Mass and the liturgy, AKA the red book Father uses at Mass), it states: “The faithful are invited to continue adoration before the Blessed Sacrament for a suitable length of time during the night, according to circumstance.” An ancient tradition known as Seven Churches Visitation, (also known as Church Hopping, Holy Thursday Pilgrimage or 7 Churches Pilgrimage) grew out of this time of prayer and adoration.

Begun by St. Philip Neri in Ancient Rome, on Holy Thursday, the faithful enter into this pilgrimage of remaining with Jesus in the garden by visiting several churches – traditionally seven (The Seven Basilicas of Rome), or whatever number is possible –ideally ending up at the cathedral of the diocese– to pray before the Blessed Sacrament at the altar of repose in each church, remembering Our Lord’s words to His disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane to keep watch with Him for one hour.

In each church, the altar of repose is decorated with beautiful, fragrant spring flowers and surrounded by flickering candlelight that breaks the darkness in the rest of the church. Praying at these altars brings our hearts and minds right to the garden, as we pray there with Jesus.

The centuries-old pilgrimage weaves together passages from all four Gospels to take you through the narrative from Christ’s capture in the Garden of Gethsemane and subsequent transfer to the hands of the high priest Caiaphas, Herod and Pontius Pilate during the beginning of his Passion.

*Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22: 39-46)*

*Jesus bound and taken before Annas (John 18: 19-22)*

*Jesus taken before the High Priest, Caiaphas (Matthew 26: 63-65)*

*Jesus taken before Pilate (John 18, 35-37)*

*Jesus taken before Herod (Luke 23: 8-9; 11)*

*Jesus taken before Pilate again (Matthew 27: 22-26)*

*Jesus crowned with thorns (Matthew 27: 27-31)*

The seven churches and altars of repose correspond to each of the seven places, or “stations,” that were made by Jesus between the Last Supper in the Upper Room to His crucifixion on the cross. In each church, the pilgrim kneels

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before the Altar of Repose, meditates on the appropriate Scripture, and offers prayers and adoration. In this way, pilgrims seek to spiritually accompany Christ as he enters his Passion. At the seventh station, many will close their pilgrimage by opting to observe a Holy Hour. Traditionally, churches remain open until midnight, then they are closed to symbolize Christ's abandonment by his apostles the night of his imprisonment.

The 7 Churches pilgrimage is a self-guided pilgrimage that you may do on your own or with a group. Don't worry about the size of your group at first, just invite your family, or three or four people, as a starting point. This is a great tradition for families to engage in, and children enjoy the idea of being out late and walking into the prayerful, darkened spaces of the various churches—a wonderfully catechetical experience of encountering Mystery. For participating families with young ones, adaptations can be made for the sake of time. Pilgrim families may choose to say prayers for two stations at one location. Additionally, you may choose upon concluding your pilgrimage to share a meal with those you made the pilgrimage with, as long as it is before midnight, as this will be your last meal before the fasting begins.

For Catholics, the notion of going on pilgrimage—even a mini-pilgrimage such as this one—represents our recognition that we are on a journey to life with God in the fullness of his Kingdom. Our life on earth is not merely something to be tolerated as we await our true destination. Rather, our life on earth is a journey, and we encounter God along the way. As Catholics, we symbolize this journey by making pilgrimages to holy places. Participants in a pilgrimage are not just travelers; they are pilgrims. To be a pilgrim is to be on a sacred journey in search of fulfillment in God. As a Church, we are a “pilgrim people,” traveling together toward our God. As a sacramental people, a pilgrimage is just one more example of how we embody our faith

This mini-pilgrimage can take any shape or form depending on your circumstances. Remember the goal is to spend a few minutes in each church, praying before the Blessed Sacrament, and keeping vigil on the night that Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane before his arrest, asking his disciples to stay awake with him. The Seven Churches Visitation is a powerful way to spend time in adoration, meditating on Christ's sacrifice of love for the salvation of souls in preparation for the joy of Easter. It is an opportunity to connect with a venerated tradition of the Church in a new way! There is something special about visiting churches late into the night. It is not just because of the opportunity to visit other parishes, it's because of intentionally seeking Christ to spend time with Him and contemplating the gift of His love.

May your pilgrimage be blessed and your relationship with our Lord grow!

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